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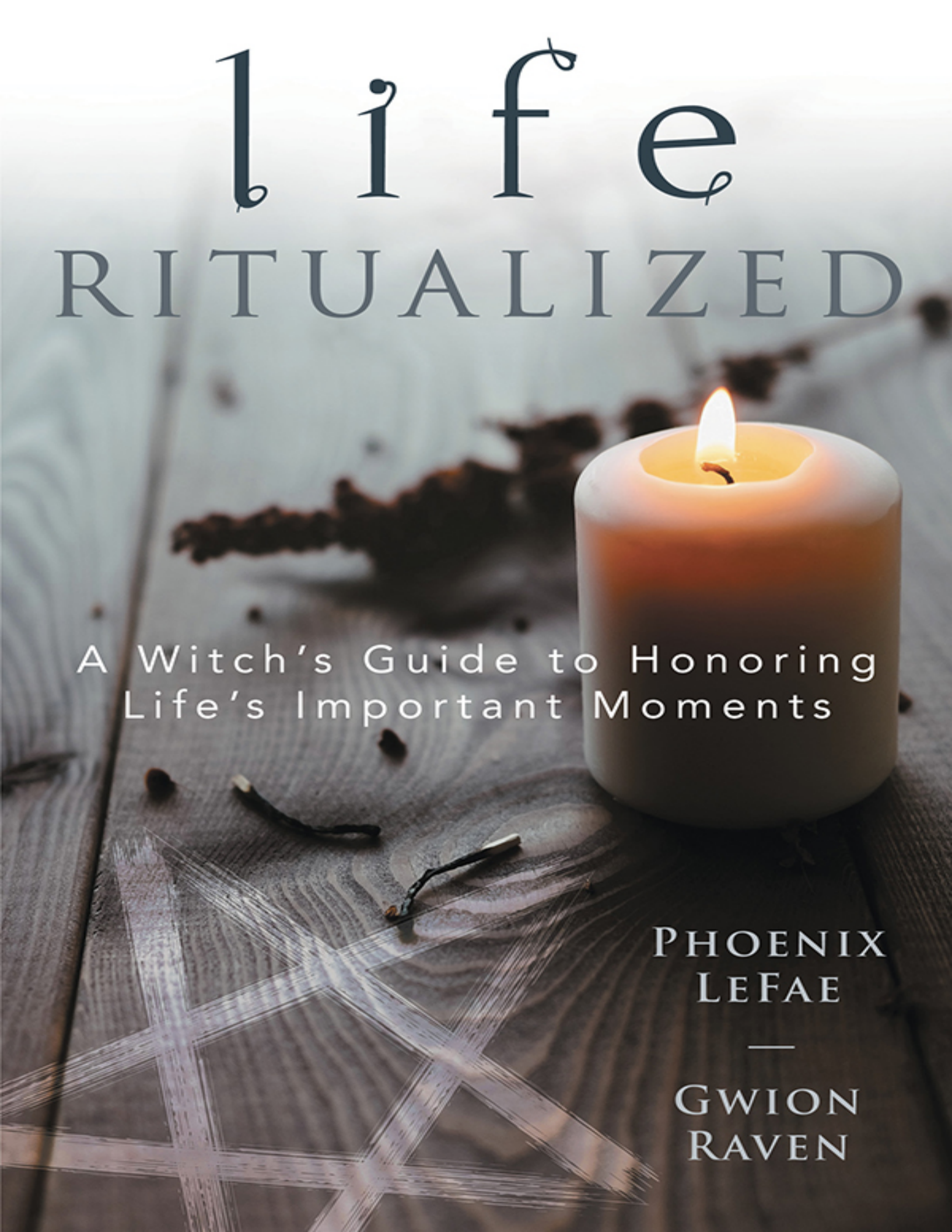

A Witch's Guide to Honoring Life's Important Moments

PHOENIX LEFAE

—

GWION RAVEN

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About Phoenix LeFae

Phoenix LeFae (Sebastopol, CA) is a professional reader, rootworker, teacher, and ritualist. She has been practicing Witchcraft for twenty-five years, and her teachings are connected to the Reclaiming tradition, Druidry, and Gardnerian Wicca. She is also the co-owner of an esoteric goddess shop called Milk & Honey.

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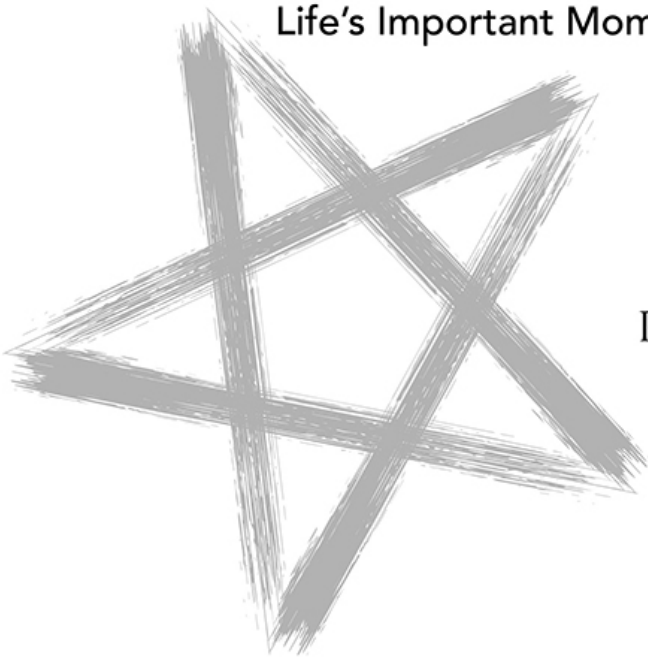

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This book is dedicated to all our teachers who passed along their wisdom, experience, and the art of ritual making.

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First things first, there are a great number of people who helped make this book possible. Surely, there is someone we will forget to acknowledge, so we are taking care of you right now and giving you a great big thank you. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to anyone that we have ever circled with, been in classes with, or attended rituals with. Y'all have impacted how we look at ritual and rites of passage, so thanks.

Big Wiccan Jesus gratitude to our dear friend and beloved, Jason Mankey, for writing the foreword to this book and for encouraging us to keep writing.

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Finally, most importantly, to our family and friends who are a part of all the personal stories we shared: Thank you for filling our lives with joy and love.

Disclaimer

In the following pages you will find recommendations for the use of certain herbs, oils, nuts, or other ritual items. If you are allergic to any of these items, please refrain from use.

Although the rituals in this book can help you if you are going through a hard time, the material in this book is not intended as a substitute for trained medical or psychological advice. The information in this book is not meant to diagnose, treat, prescribe, or substitute consultation with a licensed healthcare professional. Readers are advised to consult their personal healthcare professionals regarding treatment.

If you are struggling and need assistance, please reach out to the resource that might best to get you through it.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Hotline: 1-888-843-4564.

FOREWORD

When people ask me what the purpose of ritual is, I generally reply with the word “connection.” The idea of connection is readily apparent in the most common types of rituals performed by Witches and Pagans. During the sabbats, we connect with the earth, the turn of the seasons, and the Wheel of the Year. When we practice spellwork, we connect with the magickal current that has been a part of the human experience for tens of thousands of years, even if we aren’t always consciously aware of it. Some Witches and Pagans connect with higher powers and energies during ritual: ancestors, deities, the Fae, the Watchtowers, and many other entities.

There are also the rituals we do that connect us with community. Sometimes those gestures are small, perhaps sharing food and drink in the ritual context of “cakes and ale,” while other times they are large, such as an initiation into a tradition or group. You’ll find a lot of community rituals in this book, many of them obvious, such as handfastings and blessings for newborn children (often known as Wiccanings). But the magick and wonder of *Life Ritualized* is that you’ll find other things to connect to in the course of reading this book that are mostly overlooked, and I know this is true because it happened to me.

When engaging in a ritual for what might feel like a mundane rite of passage, such as getting a driver's license, we are still engaging in connection. If you are a parent, rituals for events like this offer a chance to connect with your now-driving young adult, and for those who have just received their driver's license, they are connecting to what they have accomplished along with the potential and possibilities that come with such an achievement. Those are all important energies and feelings to connect with, and doing so through ritual makes them both more memorable and more powerful.

What I love about this book is that it made me cry in places. Not all rituals take place in happy and triumphant times; sometimes they take place during times of extreme sadness or sorrow. No one wants to bury a family member or a pet, but such experiences are a part of our existence and can't simply be ignored. When we engage in ritual during those circumstances, we also connect with things, even if it's hard to feel that connection in the midst of our grief. In a mundane sense, we connect with the memories of those we've lost, forging a place for them that will exist forever in our hearts. In a magickal sense (we are Witches, after all), we connect with their spirits, knowing that they will continue to be with us in the future, though in a different way.

One of the hardest things to do in our society today is to connect with ourselves. There is constant pressure for us to be something we are not, and to live a life not in accordance with our true wills. We are assigned names, identities, and gender roles by our parents, work associates, and sometimes even our friends; some just don't match who we really are. You'll find rituals to claim your true name or authentic self in this book. These are the rituals that help us connect to who we really are, and such rites might be the most important ones in this book.

If rituals are about connection, then it holds true that some rites might be about connection's opposite: separation. There are times when we need to cut the cords that bind us to one another, whether that's a failed marriage, relationship, or even a coven. Moving forward can be challenging and

difficult, but ritual provides context and meaning for why we have to forge ahead. Breaking the chains that hold us to others also serves as another source of connection; a connection to the brighter days that will come when we you do what's best for ourselves, even if it's painful in the short term.

As a Witch I often overlook the importance of ritual when it comes to connecting with people from outside of magickal traditions and backgrounds. One of the best things about this book is just how practical it is. If you are planning a baby shower or a handfasting, you are most likely going to end up inviting people from outside the Pagan world, and having rituals that include everyone, regardless of belief system, is something overlooked in many Witch books. Most of us share energies and relationships with all sorts of people; rituals that allow the non-Witches who populate our lives to participate help us build stronger connections to these folx.

Many Witch books feel as if they are written by people whose experiences aren't honest; that's not the case with Phoenix and Gwion. When they share a ritual with you, it comes from their myriad of experiences as Witches over the past twenty-five years. They've raised children, lost jobs, dealt with heartache and loss, and been a part of practically every coven situation. The rites in this book are not hypotheticals—they come from two lives lived with meaning and authenticity. (And when they need a little bit of help, they turn to the fabulous Misha Magdalene. I literally squealed when I saw Misha in these pages.)

This is a book you'll probably read in one sitting, but it won't be one you'll set aside afterward. It will be one you flip through in the months and years to come when you need to capture a moment or an emotion through ritual. This is the rare book that is just as magickal as it is practical. It's also that elusive "second-level" book for Witches and Pagans that shares the types of essential rituals and practices that are often ignored by other authors.

One of my philosophies as a Witch is to continually “find the sacred in the mundane.” In the pages of this book, you’ll find the rituals that will help to manifest that reality. There are many instances in this book where Phoenix and Gwion take the average moments that are often overlooked and turn them into something inspiring and wonderful. After reading this book, you’ll see ritual in a whole new light, and hopefully you will make many of the powerful and sacred connections that make life truly worth living.

Jason Mankey
April 2020
Jason Mankey is a third-degree Gardnerian High Priest and helps run two Witchcraft covens in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, Ari. Jason is a popular speaker at Pagan and Witchcraft events across North America and Great Britain. He is the channel manager at Patheos Pagan*, the world’s most-read Pagan blogging site, and writes there at Raise the Horns. He also writes for the magazine* Witches & Pagans. *Jason is the author of* Transformative Witchcraft, The Witch’s Athame, *and* The Witch’s Book of Shadows *and the coauthor of* The Witch’s Altar.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern humans live in a world of time management, scheduling, multitasking, and keeping busy. Every moment seems to bring another technological breakthrough designed to remind you to join another group, track your steps, count your calories, book your flights, and post photos of it all on half a dozen carefully curated social media sites. There are books and apps and websites quite happy to tell you (or sell you?) what to expect when you're expecting a baby or how to tie the matrimonial knot in just the right way. There are countless commercials depicting how perfectly lovely your family gatherings could be if you were to merely purchase from the right retailer on the correct day. The world—and indeed, your life—is given to the drudgery of deadlines, work weeks, and predictable life events happening along the way. Society sets rough timelines for us: graduate at eighteen; go to college from eighteen to twenty-two; plan to marry by twenty-seven; become a parent by thirty-two; get divorced by forty; remarry by forty-five; dead by seventy-eight, or maybe ninety if you are lucky.

Even though humans are more connected than ever, we live with the illusion of isolation. Many people move through life disconnected and distracted. You're indoctrinated from an early age to become an individual success by pulling up your bootstraps and forging your own way in the

world. If you don't have it all today, no problem, you can rewrite your stories and build a stronger and brighter tomorrow. *Just keep going.* It's no wonder anxiety and depression rates continue to rise. There are explanations and articles and insightful life hacks, but most of them suggest *doing* more. We're so busy making our way in life, doing all the things, and running a successful side hustle that we often miss the most important parts of life that make it so wonderful.

It's our (the two of us writing this book) belief that one of modern Western society's most pernicious problems is a lack of mystery. One dictionary definition of the word mystery is "profound, inexplicable, or secretive quality or character." [1] As you might imagine, secret, profound, and inexplicable experiences are hard to package in a box and even harder to resell online. There's a secondary definition of mystery, and one that serves the purposes of this book more readily: from the Middle English *mysterie*, defined as a "hidden religious truth, rite or event with religious significance, hidden meaning." [2]

Humans live in a world chock-full of mystery and magick, but the often oppressive crush of civilization makes you blind to it—or worse, encourages you to rush past it. We believe part of "mystery blindness" comes from a lack of ritual and ceremony. Rituals and ceremonies create space to honor change, transition, growth, success, and loss. Rituals and ceremonies create places where you can give yourself over to grief, joy, love, and pain—and not just feel these emotions on a surface level, but really revel in them, fully immerse yourself in them, and potentially begin to process and move through them. Rituals and ceremonies, by their very design, encourage you to slow down and experience the moment you are in.

Now, you might be thinking to yourself, *But wait. Rituals are written down. I can read books and talk with folks about these rites of passage. How then can they promote mystery?* It's a fair question. The thing to understand about rites of passage is that they need to be experienced.

Mystery is mysterious by default and the depths of many mysteries cannot be learned logically. They must be experienced viscerally.

Rites of Passage: The Big and the Small

The liturgy of rituals, the practices of rites of passage, and the actions of ceremony have a level of mystery built into them in plain sight, but most folks don't notice it. It's those gaps between what is written and known, unwritten and unknown, where mystery lives and where rites of passage get their power.

In most religious rites, including Witchcraft and Pagan rituals, theurgy is observed, which is when a space is created that asks the universe, gods, or magick if they would like to intervene. As an example of this space—this place where the gods are asked to join the rite, where the mystery resides—consider wedding ceremonies you've attended or seen in movies. There is the question of whether the bride will show up or leave the groom at the altar. That's a space for mystery. There's that awkward moment of silence when the officiant entreats the congregation to "speak now or forever hold your peace." What would happen if someone spoke up? And of course, there is a chance that someone won't say "I do." There is an uncertain quality, even in this most familiar ritual. There is still room for the gods to intervene.

For the most part, mainstream culture doesn't honor many of the markers in life that might be called a rite of passage. It seems only churches, temples, and synagogues still hold formal ceremonies to honor personal changes, dedications, and dying. Rites of passage extend well beyond birth, marriage, and death, but these big moments seem to be the only moments our culture can see. How can modern Witches and Pagans create rites honoring all manner of significant moments in life? And how can ritual be incorporated to commemorate the rites of passage people go through in the modern world?

The weird and complicated thing about a rite of passage is that they aren't always as simple as they seem. Sometimes you don't know when they've started. It isn't always obvious who is going through a rite of passage and why. There is also an awkward part in the middle when you are no longer the thing that you were, but you're not quite yet the thing you are becoming. And how do you know when you've made it to the other side?

The point of this book is to give a framework for modern rites of passage to make them more recognizable and accessible. We'll attempt to map out liminal space without intruding upon it, we will shed a little light on the concept of mystery, and we will address the serious and silly moments that come from life's marking points. Our aim with this book is to simultaneously demystify and preserve the mystery of the rituals that impact life so greatly.

We have one last important note for you here. This book was written by two people, but (we hope) with one voice. Although we are a married couple, our backgrounds and feelings on some of the rites of passage differ. We spent many hours discussing, reshaping, clarifying, and even … ahem … arguing with each other about just how to write specific pieces. What you're reading really is a joint effort. Many sections we wrote together or collaborated on to an extent that it is hard to tell whose voice is whose. However, you will notice throughout the book that there are anecdotes specifically attributed to one of us. For ease of reading, we will specify whose voice you are experiencing when that seems necessary.

Opening Anecdote by Gwion

Many years ago, I took a three-day "rite of passage" workshop. Fifteen participants and two facilitators gathered in a yurt on a gorgeous piece of land, surrounded by oak trees and vineyards. The teachers were skilled. They led us through a series of exercises and meditations. We shared dream journals, worked in pairs and small groupings, ate together, and slept in the same space. The work of the long weekend was lovely and

sweet. But, try as I might, I couldn't see what any of it had to do with a rite of passage.

A year later I took the same workshop, this time taught by a different facilitation team. The content was similar, but the emphasis of the work pulled on threads the first class had not. The focus still centered on dreamwork, but it brought in myths too. The question "Do dreams and myths have an effect on our daily lives?" was posed right at the outset. Something about that question resonated with me.

After the second workshop, I went back through my notes from both classes and an odd thing happened. Suddenly I saw connections between the two weekends that I'd never noticed as the workshops were happening. The classes weren't really about rites of passages, or even a specific rite of passage in and of itself. No, this class was a portal, an invitation for me to acknowledge the sacred myth of my own life. The moment I accepted my life as a myth, complete with a cast of characters and events with me at the center of it all, I began to recognize patterns and signposts. Those markers begged for ritual.

A year later I became a student teacher in the same magickal tradition that sponsored the workshops. My apprenticeship lasted three years. During this time I taught with fourteen different facilitators and racked up hundreds of hours preparing and teaching classes, doing research, diving into myths, making magick, and honing my Craft. I taught the rite of passage workshop several times during my training period. As I shared the workshop with others, I began to find wrinkles in the magick and tapped into the magick I wanted to make. In short, I was putting my stamp on the class, adding to the potency of the body of lore and magick handed down to me by my teachers.

The irony is not lost on me that while I was busy becoming a teacher that facilitated a course focused on rites of passage, I was going through my own rite of passage. My connection to a magickal practice was growing in ways I couldn't have imagined or predicted. The years of my apprenticeship flew by and I jumped headlong into teaching. In my first

five years as a magickal teacher, I facilitated at least five workshops a year, planned eight annual public rituals, went to a gazillion meetings, and started taking on apprentices of my own.

My other life—you know, the one with bills and kids and a job—was changing too. There were promotions, layoffs, graduations, sickness, death, anniversaries, starting a business, closing a business, becoming a published writer, and gods know what else. Along the way, there were moments that clearly called out for ritual. In some cases, the rituals were short and sweet (a folded dollar bill secretly placed under the pillow), but other rituals required elaborate settings, multiple priestesses, journals, oaths, and witnesses.

What became apparent was that there were hundreds of opportunities to make life sacred and meaningful if I just slowed down enough to notice them. And when I did notice them, the rituals and rites of passage became clear, evident, and easy to fall into.

Opening Anecdote by Phoenix

*I started practicing Witchcraft at the age of fifteen. At that time in my life I wanted to feel special, and let's be honest, I wanted power. Not in a super villain's I-want-to-take-over-the-world kind of way, but I wanted to feel more power*full. *As a plain, slightly awkward fifteen-year-old with a freshly broken heart, feeling like I possessed a bit of power would have gone a long way. Looking back, I can see that it wasn't really the power I wanted. What I was craving was mystery.*

Being raised in a nonreligious household gave me the opportunity to discover my own path and to determine what I wanted my relationship with the world to be. It allowed me to find mystery in plants, landscapes, and the land, but I often felt a longing for ceremony, ritual, and the kind of magick that is created when people come together with a common belief.

It wasn't until I started practicing Witchcraft that I found a way of connecting to that sense of collaborative mystery and my own style of ritual. And now, getting scarily close to thirty years later, I understand

something deep and profound about humankind. I've discovered one of the great secrets of what it is to be human and I'll tell you what it is. Ready? We crave ritual.

My first ritualized rite of passage was my self-initiation ritual a year after discovering Witchcraft. It was a moving and profound experience. During that ritual I acknowledged stepping into the flow of something bigger than myself. For me, it was a ceremony where I fully stepped into my power and aligned myself with thousands of people across the globe who also called themselves Witches.

I performed the rite on my own, in the comfort of my bedroom, in my parents' house. I used a stolen butter knife (with a groovy 1970s wooden handle) as an athame and a coffee mug as my chalice. I was very earnest in my desire to be a good Witch. I named myself as a child of the goddess. No one witnessed this ritual. No one celebrated it with me, and I told no one I had done it. It was secret; a rite of passage that was only for me. And I'll tell you what, it totally, radically, and unequivocally changed my life.

Decades later, I initiated into a magickal tradition where there was a celebration and party at the end of the ordeal. Through that ritual, I knew what it meant to be supported by other Witches. I regret nothing about my teenage self-initiation, but I do wish that young woman could have felt the same support in her first magickal initiation that I experienced in my first traditional initiation.

That night in my room with the butter knife was the first of many rites that I have stepped into with awareness and an open heart. And I know there will be many more to come.

[contents]

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1. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "mystery," accessed July 19, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mystery.

2. Ibid.

one

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Of course, you can read this book from cover to cover, and you'll learn a lot about rites of passage and modern ritual. However, we highly recommend that you read through these beginning sections and then let yourself be pulled to what makes you the most curious. What rites are important in your life, and how do they show up in this book? What rites are you curious about because they are coming up in your own life? What rites feel scary or intriguing? Flip to those sections and let yourself be inspired.

It's important to remember that many Witchcraft and Pagan rituals written in the early days of the Neopaganism revival were co-opted from other traditions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fraternal orders (like the Rosicrucian Order and the Masonic Temple) were practicing rituals and ceremonies for their initiated and high-level participants. These early groups had a profound impact on the style and structure of the Witchcraft revival of the mid-twentieth century. In the 1960s through the 1990s—what might be thought of as the heyday of the Neopagan revival—the rituals that didn't previously exist from these

fraternal orders were borrowed from mainstream Christian traditions and rewritten for a wider Pagan audience.

Basically (and we are super sorry to be a potential buzzkill here), people have very little idea how ancient Pagans may have celebrated specific rites of passage. The rituals many modern Witches and Pagans are familiar with, or may have already experienced, aren't originally Pagan at all. That doesn't mean they aren't moving, beautiful, evocative, or successful. But we feel it's important to know where things originate from. Truth is power.

For example, look at a Wiccan baby blessing ritual, or a Wiccaning. Most Wiccaning rituals that you find are no different than a Christian baptism ritual; there's a goddess filling in the space for the Christian god and a "goddess parent" instead of a "godparent." In this book we do try to break the mold on some of that, but you will also find rituals that follow a more typical Neopagan, Wiccan, or modern Witchcraft setup. If you're experienced in these systems, the ritual setups are likely to look familiar. Like we said, these rituals work.

We hope that folks stepping into leadership roles in their local Pagan or Witch communities will benefit from this book. As communities grow, you will be asked more and more often to help facilitate rituals for rites of passage. If you are hearing the call to help your local community, we encourage you to read through this book from beginning to end and let yourself absorb the flow of rites of passage and how you might make these rituals your own.

This book is divided into six categories, focusing on a variety of rites of passage: Birth, Leveling Up, Personal Identity, Loss, Spiritually Focused, and Do It Yourself. In each section you'll find rites that will be familiar and obvious to you and you will also find rites that honor more subtle and modern life changes. People go through many markers of transition in modern life and we feel these moments need to be honored, celebrated, and acknowledged with ceremony. We also offer you rituals from different points of a rite of passage, the details of which we will go into in the next section.

We also want to make it explicitly clear that nothing written in the following rituals is required. As you start to perform the rituals in this book, we encourage you to change things as needed. Adjust these rituals to fit your life, your needs, and what is most important for you. Make the rituals your own. This is a guidebook, not a bible.

A few rituals in this book have guided meditation or trances. If you are performing any of these rituals on your own, it is best to record your voice reading the meditation and play it back during the ritual. If you perform the ritual with others, you can choose another person to lead the trance. The trance sections are always marked, and the parts to read or record will be in italics.

A fair number of the rituals call for creating an altar. An altar is a dedicated space where you will perform the ritual or magickal act. This can be large and elaborate or simple and small. Use the space you have and feel free to adjust as needed for your environment.

Throughout the book we may recommend herbs, oils, foods, or other things to eat, wear, or place on your skin. Don't use anything that you may be allergic to. If you are uncertain about your allergic response to any substance, don't use it. Any food suggestions should only be used if that food is safe for you. Any food that you cook should be cooked to governmental food safety standards.

It's possible you may run into some magickal terms you are unfamiliar with while reading this book. We have included a glossary at the end of the book that you can refer to as needed.

Ritual Flow

There is no one way to create a ritual. A ritual can be complex, complicated, and drawn out or short, sweet, and only one word. It is the intent and purpose of the ritual that is the important part. Rites of passage are profoundly personal. This book is filled with rituals that can serve as fully completed rituals or as jumping-off points for you to develop

something more. We encourage you to add to the rituals to make them more unique and to better connect them to you or the individual you are celebrating. At the end of the book, you will find a section on how to build and create your own rite of passage rituals.

With that said, our rituals make some formatting assumptions. For the most part, we follow a ritual flow that is most typically used in the Reclaiming tradition of Witchcraft, which is a common ritual format that anyone familiar with modern Neopagan rituals would recognize. The rituals in this book will break down into six main pieces:

1. Setting an Intention
2. Grounding
3. Creating Sacred Space
4. Tofu (or the Meat of the Ritual)
5. Releasing
6. Post-Ritual Activities

Setting an Intention

Ideally, any time you embark on performing a ritual, your first step will be to create an intention. An intention is a fancy word for a plan, but in a magickal working an intention is a short, concise sentence that encompasses the reason you are performing the ritual. Before performing any rite of passage, it is a good practice to create a clear sentence that expresses why you're entering into ritual and/or what you hope to accomplish.

Grounding

Grounding is the process of preparing your mind, body, and spirit for the magickal working that is about to take place. The grind of our regular day-to-day life can keep you distracted and disconnected from mystery. Grounding is a way to release those distractions and step into full presence for the magick.

The following exercises are examples of ways to ground yourself. Try them out and see which works best for you. Modify them to make the most impact. There are lots of ways to ground yourself. If you already have a practice that you love, use that process instead.

A Simple Grounding

Stand or sit with your feet flat on the ground and your spine as straight as possible. Breathe in deeply and slowly to the count of six. Hold your breath for the count of four. Exhale slowly to the count of eight, making a noise if you feel called to do so. Repeat this process until you feel fully in your body, grounded and calm.

Tree of Life

Stand or sit with your feet flat on the ground and your spine as straight as possible. Imagine a string coming out of the top of your head connected to a balloon that helps your neck stay straight. Breathe deeply in and out through your mouth.

When you feel ready, imagine roots extending into the ground from the bottoms of your feet. Let those roots sink down as deeply as you feel called to do so. Allow the tendrils of your roots to uncurl slowly and deliberately, moving as deep into the earth as needed.

Breathe deeply. With each exhale, release what no longer serves you down those roots. Take your time, sending down what you don’t need and letting the earth compost it. When you feel ready, inhale, drawing up the grounding power of the earth. Draw the power up and fill your body with calming earth energy.

Let the power build up, filling your cells, breath, and bones. Let this energy build up until it reaches the top of your head and spills out around you. Allow this energy to reach out like branches moving up into the sky.

Allow those branches to extend as far up as they need to go. Breathe deeply as your branches reach up into the heavens. As you exhale, let go of anything else you might need to release. As you inhale, draw down the

cool power of the sky, letting it flow down your branches and into your body. Let your body fill with invigorating sky energy.

As you breathe, notice how the power of the earth and the power of the sky mingle within you. Place your hands on the center of your body and feel yourself as the center. When you feel ready, look around the room, breathe deeply, and proceed with your ritual.

Aligning Your Body

Sit or stand with your feet on the ground and your spine as straight as possible. Breathe deeply and slowly in through your mouth, as if you are sipping from a straw. Exhale through your mouth. Repeat this process several times.

Notice what it is to be in your body at this moment. How do you feel? Where might you be distracted? See if you can move through any unease or discomfort with the power of your breath.

Place your hands on your center—this may be your belly or just above or below your belly. Continue breathing in and out through your mouth. Focus on your center being solid and present. Focus on your feet connected to the ground. Focus on your head in the sky. Feel these three things at the same time.

Breathe, letting your body come into alignment. Here. Now. Present.

Reeling In Distractions

Sit or stand with your feet on the ground and your spine as straight as possible. Breathe deeply and intentionally, gifting your body with air. As you breathe, take stock of any distractions that may keep you from being fully present. Notice any threads of distraction that might be pulling on you and simply unhook yourself from these places.

Visualize removing a hook, like on a fishing line, from the distraction and reeling the energy back into yourself. Once you have reeled in one line, scan yourself for any others. Repeat this process over and over again until you feel that all of your distractions have been released.

Breathe deeply with your eyes open and take stock of the space around you. Say aloud three things that you can see. Breathe deeply and say aloud three things that you can smell. Listen and say aloud three things that you can hear.

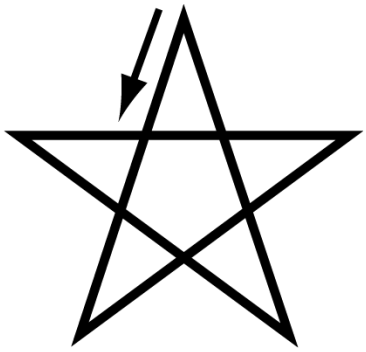
Let yourself be fully present and in the moment.

Creating Sacred Space

Creating sacred space is a moment for you to acknowledge that the world is already sacred and always has been, but for the purposes of your ritual, you want to call that into your focused awareness. Invite in the elements, deities, ancestors, or other spirits to guide, protect, and witness the rituals that you create.

Typically, the process of creating sacred space starts with casting a circle. This is setting an energetic boundary between your ritual space and the outside world. The circle holds in the magick that you are creating until you are ready to release it. It also keeps out any negative or unwanted energies that might sidetrack or interfere with your ritual.

Often the casting of a circle is done with an athame, a wand, or the first two fingers of the dominant hand. The casting of a circle can start in any direction. In some traditions you begin in the north, while others you begin in the east. For our purposes, the rituals in this book will start with casting in the north. A circle is then drawn around you, moving deosil, ending where you started. Drawing invoking pentacles at each of the four directions (north, east, south, and west) can be done to lock in the energy. This is an optional step. The last step is to create a dome of energy above and below you. The magickal circle is really more of a magickal sphere.



After the circle is cast, you can invite in the entities that will guide and support your ritual. This might include the elements or elementals, deities, ancestors, guardians, or other spirits that will help the work. Some of the rituals included in this book will have full details and written invocations for calling in elements and ancestors or deities. However, trust your instincts and speak from the heart any time you feel called to.

Here are two ways to create a ritual circle.

Iron Star

Using your wand, athame, or fingers, draw up energy from the center of the earth. Allow threads of that energy to curl around your tool. When you're ready, feeling sufficiently full, throw your energy out, as if sending out a fishing line. Visualize the line extending above and below as you turn in a circle, continuously sending out the energy.

Mist Bubble

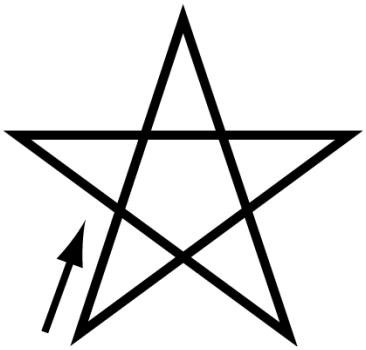
Using your wand, athame, or fingers, point in the direction you will begin creating your circle. Visualize mist shooting out of your tool to the edge of your space, filling the area where you are pointing, moving both up and down, creating a bubble. As you turn, continue to point your tool toward the edges of the circle, watching as the mist gets thicker and thicker.

Tofu (or the Meat of the Ritual)

Once you've created sacred space, you now need to *do the thing*. This is when you complete the purpose for the ritual. This could be done with a trance, a devotional, singing, creating an altar, offering blessings, ritual markings, divination, and so much more. This would also be the time for you to raise energy or charge up anything created during your process.

Releasing

Once you've completed the working of the ritual, you need to say goodbye to all the entities you invited in reverse order. Thank deities, guardians, elements or elementals, spirits, or ancestors. Banish them from the ritual space with gratitude.



You may also need to release the pentacle seals you placed in the four directions by way of "banishing" them, again doing this process in reverse order of how they were created. This is optional.

Finally, cut open the energetic bubble that you created around your ritual space, moving widdershins.

Post-Ritual Activities

Occasionally, there may be items left over from a ritual. It's good spiritual hygiene to clean this up and dispose of anything left over. Ritual remains should be dispersed, left at a crossroads, burned, recycled, or spiritually cleansed so they can be used again. Please don't leave nonbiodegradable items or otherwise harmful ritual items out in nature. Please don't burn

items that are toxic. Recycling is always a great, responsible alternative for releasing your ritual leftovers.

After a large or intense ritual, you may feel drained, even a little woozy. It's a good practice to have some food available. Chocolate works well; so does salt. Foods that are comforting (like mashed potatoes, cheese on toast, or fresh vegetables with dip) are helpful—anything that involves reuniting your magickal, imaginal self with your corporeal self. It's best if you eat slowly and deliberately, allowing yourself to take a full breath after each mouthful. Eating mindfully helps you ground, creates a feeling of safety, and gives you time to integrate the magick of the ritual.

Correspondences

When creating a ritual, spell, or ceremony, it helps to use correspondences in the working. There are times of the day, days of the week, colors, moon cycles, herbs, stones, and more that hold energies that may be in alignment with your overall goal or transition. When you include correspondences in your rituals, it can add to the power of the ceremony you create.

There are so many ways to incorporate correspondences into your rituals, but don't let yourself get overwhelmed with the possibilities. If you can use some correspondences, that's great, but it is not required. You can incorporate these things when you plan your ritual. They can be used to inform or influence when you have your ritual, what time of the day, how many people to invite, what colors to use in clothing or decoration, what additions you can make to your rituals, or what items you can gift to another person going through that rite of passage.

Colors

- Red: Love, lust, power, strength
- Orange: Manifestation, clearing, transformation, strength, success
- Yellow: Money, success, happiness, strength
- Green: Money, manifestation, success, love, abundance, fertility

• Blue: Healing, protection, communication

• Purple: Power, meditation, psychic connection, clearing, protection

• Pink: Love, romance, heart healing

• Brown: Earth connection, grounding, protection, fertility

• Black: Protection, psychic connection, sealing, banishing

• White: Blessings, meditation, protection, psychic connection, transformation

• Rainbow: Balance, harmony, stand-in for all colors

Days of the Week

• Monday: Meditation, transformation, psychic connection

• Tuesday: Protection, transformation, strength, success

• Wednesday: Meditation, sealing, psychic connection

• Thursday: Happiness, healing, money, clearing, success, power

• Friday: Love, happiness, communication, blessing, fertility

• Saturday: Clearing, healing, meditation, protection, sealing, transformation

• Sunday: Abundance, blessings, clearing, healing, manifestation, success

Numbers

• One: Abundance, fertility, happiness, healing, manifestation, protection, strength

• Two: Love, clearing, meditation

• Three: Abundance, clearing, fertility, healing, manifestation, transformation, success

• Four: Fertility, happiness, manifestation, protection, success, psychic connection

• Five: Clearing, happiness, manifestation, meditation, psychic connection

- Six: Fertility, happiness
- Seven: Transformation, meditation, psychic connection, protection
- Eight: Blessing, abundance, happiness, meditation, protection, transformation
- Nine: Healing, manifestation, protection, sealing, transformation, success

Moon Cycles

- Waxing: Moving from dark to full. This phase is used for magick or rituals for increasing, leveling up, or taking more.
- Full: A full circle in the sky. This phase is used for success, gain, accomplishment, and fertility. For magickal purposes, the energy of the full moon is available three days before and three days after the actual astrological full moon
- Waning: Moving from full to dark. This phase is used for magick or rituals for decreasing, sending away, cleansing, or banishing
- Dark: No light in the sky. This phase is used for rebirth work, death cycles, and rebirth cycles, and it is a good time for hidden workings
- Void of Course: Happens at different times. This phase happens anytime the moon is in transition from one phase to the next. It is the liminal time for the moon. It is usually a short time, but it can last up to four hours. Ideally, rituals, spells, or magickal workings should not take place during this time

Helpers

You may want to incorporate herbs or stones into your rite of passage rituals. There are entire books written about magickal herbs and crystals that can be referred to when creating your own rituals, but we wanted to give you a starting point.

Here is a basic list of common herbs, plants, resins, stones, and crystals that you can incorporate into your own rites.

Herbs, Plants, and Resins

• Cleansing: Clove, frankincense, myrrh, sage, cedar, rosemary, copal, dragon’s blood

• Peace: Lavender, skullcap, pennyroyal, vervain

• Spirituality: Cinnamon, sandalwood, gardenia, violet

• Love: Cardamom, damiana, basil, rose, bachelor’s buttons, bloodroot

• Family: Dock, mustard seeds, myrtle, patchouli, spikenard

Stones and Crystals

• Cleansing: Selenite, black tourmaline, lepidolite, hematite

• Peace: Fluorite, amethyst, angelite

• Spirituality: Quartz, celestite, shungite, sugilite

• Love: Rose quartz, pink kunzite, rhodochrosite

• Family: Garnet, pink calcite, carnelian

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two

DEFINING RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of passage occur in every culture. That sounds like a bold statement, but it's absolutely true. Look through sacred texts or anthropological studies of long-gone civilizations and you'll find rites of passage. Dig into the myths of classical Greece or the tales of the First Nations peoples of North America; trek to India and see the temples in Mumbai or sit in a stone circle in Wiltshire. In every one of these places and a million more, you will find accounts of rites of passage happening, right up through the present day. There's one simple reason for this: humans. As long as there have been human beings, there have been rites of passage.

Perhaps we should start with defining just what a rite of passage is. French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep is credited with coining the phrase in his work *The Rites of Passage*. Van Gennep explores humankind's universal practice of acknowledging and celebrating the transitions a person undergoes throughout their lifetime. His work further demonstrates how ceremonies—and initiations in particular—alter the status or standing of a person going through the transition and their society's reaction to the change. Most importantly, he advances the idea

that rites of passage rituals ultimately ease the mind, and perhaps the very soul, of the individual going through the transition. It's as if the community at large is saying, "We know the journey you're on is new, scary, strange, confusing, or painful, but we went through this too. We made it to the other side. We'll wait for you there and celebrate you once you arrive. You've got this, even if you don't believe that right now."

Specifically, then, a rite of passage is the process of transitioning from one state of being to another. At the beginning of the rite, you are one thing, one type of person, and after the rite you are changed, reconfigured. It's not just a personal transformation, though; there's a societal and cultural component to this change as well. Not only have you journeyed through the rite to reach a changed status, the community you belong to now holds you in an updated regard. There really is a difference between the "old" you and the "new" you. The community says you are now allowed to call yourself by *this* name and they honor that. The community says, as a member who has undergone such-and-such a rite of passage, you have the authority, vested in you by the community, to participate in community at *this* particular level.

The reverse is also true, but it's not spoken about in quite the same way. Once you've gone through a specific rite of passage and are no longer what you were before, the behaviors of that former status are no longer appropriate for you. To quote the biblical phrase, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." [3]

Curiously enough, rites of passage occur whether they are acknowledged or not. They are the product of human existence, and many of them are tied specifically to the biology of being human. Puberty is a great example of this. For most people, puberty happens; bodies undergo significant transformations in a pretty rapid fashion, and before you know it, you've moved from childhood into adolescence, at least on a biological level. The physical signs are usually easy to spot. Other biological rites of passage

happen too, each with their own markers. Menstruation and the cessation of menstruation, a first shave, or a first orgasm. The good news—or bad news, depending on how you view this—is that everyone you know is going through, or will go through, most of these changes right along with you.

As biological changes occur, your place shifts within the context of the societies you participate in. Often, with age comes more responsibility. As you get older, there are assumptions projected onto you from others. Some of these projections are starting to fall out of fashion, thank goodness! But think about how many young couples are continually asked the questions "When are you going to get married?" or "When are you going to start having babies?" These are projections of our society's expectations, based on biology and age.

Two Biological Rites of Passage Everyone Goes Through

All humans go through, at a minimum, two shared rites of passage. These two rites of passage will happen for every single human being: we all are born, and we all die.

Everyone was born. You could say the status change was pretty obvious with that one. Everyone has gone from a state of nonbeing to a state of being. At birth or shortly thereafter, you were likely named and assigned a gender. Each of those actions impacted how you were—and are—viewed in your community. At the other end of the spectrum, of course, is death. That's the other rite of passage everyone goes through. One day you will die, and you'll transition again from a state of being to a state of nonbeing. At the moment of your death, you may still occupy a place in the community, but your title will change again. You become an ancestor, a memory, one of the beloved dead.

It’s often said that one must go through these two rites of passage alone, but do you really? The obvious answer is “yes” because it is your body, consciousness, and soul that comes in and out of the world. But, viewed another way, other people are nearly always involved. Being born means there was another human being that went through the processes of childbirth. The progression from insemination to delivery is without a doubt a rite of passage. For some people, becoming pregnant and giving birth becomes a rite of passage into a way of life known as motherhood. However, for others, becoming pregnant and giving birth does not come with the title of mother or even a desire to hold that title, and yet, they went through the rite of passage. Additionally, one may earn the title of mother without ever being pregnant or giving birth. Giving birth is one experience, whereas becoming a mother is something completely different. And yet, they are both rites of passage with a similar energy.

It’s the same with dying. In most cases, there are medical professionals, religious folk, friends, lovers, and children that tend to you during the dying process. Even in unforeseen, tragic accidents there are emergency personnel or first responders there with you, whether you’re aware of it or not. Your death has an impact on someone. If you’re fortunate, there will be a memorial service, funeral, or celebration of your life held by those you leave behind. In that way, you’re still present, at least for a little longer.

Rites of Passage Based on Chronology

There are other rites of passage that are loosely tied to biology, but not quite as universally as birth and death. In certain cases, transitions occur with chronology. For example, in Judaism a community member becomes a bar or bat mitzvah (literally, “one of the commandments”) upon their twelfth or thirteenth birthday. Their status has changed within the community, simply by reaching the designated age. It’s the same with quinceañeras, sweet sixteen parties, and cotillion; a person is viewed

differently because they've attained a certain age and the attainment of that age is celebrated.

Turning eighteen often confers the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. In many societies an eighteen-year-old can enter into a legal contract, vote, get a tattoo, join the military, or get married all without needing the consent of parents or guardians. Reaching the legal drinking age or attaining senior citizen status are both examples of rites of passage based solely upon one's age.

Other transitions are tied to one's time on the planet, but without the necessity of a strict age attached to them. For instance, it's fairly common in Paganism for a person to take on the mantle of "crone." Becoming a crone can be tied to one's physical age, but more often it's aligned with the perceived attainment of wisdom, the shift of menstruation into menopause, or a sense of elderhood in a tradition. There isn't a specific line in the sand that designates crone from non-crone. A crone is likely to be an elder woman, but beyond that, the specifics are often left up to the individual, or the community, to determine when someone has stepped into the role of crone.

The Liminality of Rites

During every rite of passage, there are moments of liminal space. Liminal spaces are the squishy boundary areas where two things meet and are not wholly one thing or the other thing. Think of it like this: What is the moment of pause between the inhale and exhale? It's a part of the breathing process for sure, but it's neither inhaling nor exhaling, neither breathing nor not breathing. It's something else in between. That's what a liminal moment is.

Liminal moments happen along the way during rites of passage and they are often the most uncomfortable parts of the process. It is during the liminal time that you know something is shifting, but you may not know what. For example, during the rite of passage of giving birth, the liminal

space happens right before you start to push. You are in labor, but you are not yet giving birth. You're moving from being pregnant to being not pregnant; there's just this little matter of childbirth to work though. It could be painful, it could be scary, it could be a blessing, a moment of connection. It's often undefinable. You are likely to run into liminal moments at different points all along the way.

Stages of a Rite of Passage

We've defined rites of passage as a process of transitioning from one state of being to another, which includes a change of community status, but rites of passage are really a little trickier than that to define because they aren't static moments, but rather a series of moments. It's important to define three additional words that often go hand in hand with rites of passage: transition, ritual, and transformation.

Transition, by its very meaning, conveys an idea of movement—going from one place or state of being to another, so to speak. Transitions are the moment-by-moment steps you take on the journey of a rite of passage. The ritual is the moment you formally acknowledge the rite of passage. You can acknowledge the beginning, the middle, or the end of the rite of passage. It's not unheard of to ritualize the beginning and the end of a rite of passage. Likewise, transformation could be described as arriving at some destination, physically, societally, or spiritually, after experiencing a rite of passage.

Here's a really simple way of putting it. The transition is what happens to you along the way. It's *your* transition. How are you being impacted, changed, and reshaped by making this journey happen? The ritual commences when the steps of the journey have been completed. It's when you say, "I've made it to the threshold, and I'm going to acknowledge the moment I step through the door." The next step, the transformation, could happen immediately with a lightning flash, but it most likely comes over time. It's the recognition that you completed your quest or made it through

a difficult situation and are somehow changed for it. The transformation might look like a newfound inner peace, maturity, finding a place for grief, or looking at the world and your place in it from a very different position.

Transition, transformation, liminal, ritual, and rite of passage—the words don't mean the same thing. They aren't quite interchangeable, but they all coalesce around you. You're the common denominator on the profound odyssey that is your rite of passage.

Here's a little secret about rites of passage: your entire life is one rite of passage after another. Folks often ask when a rite of passage begins and when it ends, and the answer is that everyone is in a constant rite of passage. What differentiates the beginning or end of any period of change or growth is ritual. The rituals you create give you context, a framework, and a language to communicate that a new phase of your life is beginning.

While any particular ritual holds the potential to be life changing, mind-blowing, ecstatic, or terrifying, the rituals themselves are only markers of the shifts that are already taking place. It's not important what the structure of the ritual might be as long as it's meaningful to the folks going through the rite of passage. What you're really doing is designating a moment in time to recognize and honor a part of the transition. The importance of the ritual isn't the potential drama; it's not about the dresses or rings, songs, or sacrifices—although that is fun. What's vital is that the ritual honoring the rite of passage signifies to yourself and to your community that there's been a shift.

The weird thing is that the shift or change most folks ascribe to a moment in ritual doesn't actually take place in the ritual itself. It's either happened already, or it's still yet to happen. What has shifted, in most cases, is our relationship to the moment. For example, if you attend a funeral for a loved one, the ritual is the formal, ceremonial end of that person's life, but the death has already happened and the grief for the survivors is just beginning. What you're doing is giving yourself permission to cry, wail, and say goodbye, and to announce that you're now in the terrible club called "I lost someone I love dearly and am now

commencing on a journey of putting myself back together again, and I have no idea how to do that." At some point, perhaps many years later, that same person may mark a different moment, when the rite of passage known as "getting through the grief and being at peace with the fact that there will always be some level of grief left to deal with, but it's time to move on" will come upon them. Perhaps that ritual will involve putting love letters into storage, moving away from a family home, or falling in love with another person.

It's the same with magickal initiations. The ritual confers upon a person a new degree, membership of an inner circle, or whatever the rite is designed for. What's generally true is that attaining the rank of high priestess doesn't make someone automatically a great high priestess. The ritual truly is acknowledging that the individual has the right to go on a journey of learning to live up to the title of high priestess and the expectations attached to that title.

If the ritual isn't really the rite of passage, it's just a marker of a part of the transition, then how do you know how to identify rites of passage and when they start or end? It's here that we begin to look at how rites of passage manifest. We've identified several distinct stages that occur with many transitions. In virtually every case, we've determined that these stages are present, whether or not the person or persons going through the rite are consciously aware of the stages.

Each stage presents its own unique opportunity for self-reflection and magick. Every distinct step leads one closer to the next phase of the rite, and they build on one another. Put another way, to get to the third stage, one must transit through stages one and two first—there's no skipping ahead.

Stage One: The Catalyst

Every rite of passage begins with a catalyst. If you're really lucky, that catalyst comes in the form of a calling with an abundantly clear message: I need to get divorced, I want to become a parent, it's time for me to get a

new job, and so on. The calling can also present itself as a persistent level of discomfort, which can be akin to the feeling of being uncomfortable in one's skin, being dissatisfied with your current situation, or recognizing that there is some ineffable thing begging for change. It's like having a word on the tip of your tongue; you know the word, but you can't quite get it out of your mouth.

In some situations, the catalyst comes as a demand. The death of a loved one, being terminated from a job, or having a spouse walk out on you are all types of catalysts that come without any warning. They demand for you to take action and forever change the trajectory of your life. They are not sought out; they just happen.

In mythological stories, the calling is often the part of the tale where the soon-to-be hero feels constrained by their current life and looks to the future, faraway lands, or adventure to change their circumstances. For example, in the Sumerian poem "The Descent of Inanna," the goddess Inanna becomes a queen, a wife, and ruler of the heavens. For all intents and purposes, Inanna accomplished everything a person could ever hope to; yet, we are told that one day Inanna opened her ear to the great below. What followed was a calling to descend into the Underworld. Once Inanna had passed through the gates from her heavenly realm to the unknown lands of her sister, Inanna's rite of passage began in earnest. Through the harrowing ordeal that followed, and the decisions she faced once she returned, Inanna learned the full meaning of the life-death-rebirth cycle.[4]

Not all rites of passage are grand adventures to explore the Underworld, but the calling is the same. Think about your own life for a minute. Perhaps there came a time when you moved out of a parent or guardian's home. Before moving out, you may have hoarded housewares or dreamed of your college dorm room. There was anticipation, maybe even anxiety, because you understood that the day was coming when you'd move away from everything familiar into a new life, filled with uncertainty.

This is the catalyst in the form of a calling.

The demand, on the other hand, is not a thing you hear, like Inanna turning her ear to the great below. Rather, it is more immediate, and perhaps unwelcomed.

As a mythological example, in the Eastern European story of *Vasilisa the Brave* or *Vasilisa the Beautiful*, the young girl Vasilisa was thrust out of her home by her stepmother and left to face the dangers of the woods. As a ruse to get rid of the child, the stepmother had extinguished all of the house's fires so that the house was dark and cold. The stepmother then sent Vasilisa into the wild to retrieve fire from the Witch that lived in the woods. The demand was perilous, and Vasilisa had no clear choice to avoid this task that was set before her.[5]

The catalyst in the form of a demand is likely not something you would choose. It may not be something you have time to prepare for or plan. For some rites of passage, the demand is foisted upon you from outside forces, whether you like it or not. In modern life this can look like the unexpected loss of a loved one, the sudden ending of a relationship, or other dramatic changes in circumstance. These are all powerful, uncomfortable, and unavoidable demands to a rite of passage.

For many, the process of moving out of their childhood home isn't a sweet story of packing up for college, but rather, being thrust into the wild without any understanding of what to do or where to go, much like Vasilisa.

It's important to note that the catalyst isn't always a tender moment marking a life transition. Catalysts can be harsh, cruel, horrible shifts of circumstance. If you experience a calling or demand, ultimately you are experiencing the catalyst.

If you are lucky, part of the catalyst is a process of listening and then exploring. This is where you get to ask the questions about the rite of passage. *Is this right for me? Is this the right time to start out on this journey? What discernment can I practice to determine which rite of passage I should be embarking on? How have others done this? What do I*

need to know about the process? Fact-finding and research are important steps of the catalyst.

It's imperative to note here that when the catalyst comes in the form of a demand, it won't always leave space for the questioning process. However, when the catalyst comes as the calling, there is space for questioning and research, like a spiritual initiation, getting married, or picking up and moving to another country because you are just compelled to do it.

The next two rituals are offered as ways to consciously connect with the process of the catalyst. If you are starting to feel there is an impending shift of circumstance in front of you and you are uncertain on what it is or what you should do, try the Becoming the Fool ritual to offer guidance. If you find yourself thrust into an unexpected rite of passage, uncertain how to move forward, try the Embracing the Tower ritual as a way to connect to your allies.

Becoming the Fool: A Calling Ritual

In a traditional tarot deck, the first tarot card in the major arcana is called the Fool. The imagery often shows a young person with a rucksack on their back, walking along a path with their head in the clouds, and not looking where they are stepping. Often there is an ally, typically a dog, attempting to warn the young person to look where they are going because the cliff's edge is nearby.

This card is often read as a warning. It says, "Pay attention to the wisdom of allies." But the card also tells you the journey is about to begin. Now is the time to leap, and to trust that there's a net somewhere on the way down that is going to catch you. Now is the time to take a leap of faith, start on the journey, and trust, knowing your allies are looking out for you.

This is also the energy of the calling.

To prepare for this ritual, find an image of the Fool tarot card that you really love and set it in the center of your ritual space. You will need to be alone and undisturbed for at least an hour for this ritual. There is a trance

as part of this ritual; record it ahead of time and play it back at the appropriate time. You will also need a flat surface where you can create your altar, building around the tarot card. There is no specific time of day or night to perform this ritual. Perhaps look through the correspondences list for suggestions. Choose a time that feels the most auspicious to you.

Supplies: Your favorite Fool tarot card, four seven-inch candles, a comfortable place to sit or lie down, a journal, and a pen.

Set Up: Before setting up your ritual space, take a cleansing bath or shower. Use the time you are bathing to release anything from your spirit body that doesn't serve this work. Let it flow off your body and down the drain. Use a salt scrub to lightly exfoliate your skin and slough off anything from your physical body.

Once you've cleansed yourself, place the Fool card in the center of your altar with the four candles around it: one each to the left and right of the card, one above, and one below.

Ground yourself using one of the techniques listed in the introduction or in your favorite way.

Ritual: Pick up the candle that is above the tarot card, light the candle, and say: "I call upon my guides and guardians from the northern realms. I face the unknown. Please bring your strength and help me find solid footing on my path."

Carefully set the lit candle down and pick up the next candle, moving in a clockwise direction. Light the candle and say: "I call upon my guides and guardians from the eastern realms. I face the unknown. Please bring your clarity and help me hear the best direction to move."

Set down that candle and pick up the candle below the tarot card. Light the candle and say: "I call upon my guides and guardians from the southern realms. I face the unknown. Please bring your passion and help me feel what my heart most longs for."

Set down that candle and pick up the final candle. While lighting it, say: “I call upon my guides and guardians from the western realms. I face the unknown. Please bring your wisdom and help me feel the right steps to take.”

Take a moment to call upon any specific guides, deities, or ancestors you may want to help you in this working. Speak from the heart. When you are done and feel ready, sit or lie down.

Trance: *Take several slow deep breaths, allowing yourself to come fully into your body. Imagine a warm white light enveloping your toes. Let this light pulse and glow; everything it touches fully relaxes.*

As you continue to breathe, the light moves upward, surrounding your feet and ankles. The light travels up to your shins and calves, warm and light. Your muscles are relaxed as the light touches them. Your breath continues and the light continues flowing upward, covering your thighs and hips. The light surrounds your sex and lower back, leaving you relaxed and warm.

The light continues to flow upward, filling your belly and flowing up your spine, warming and relaxing every bit of you it touches. Continue to breathe, allowing this enveloping light to flow upward, warming your chest and your shoulders, flowing down your arms, into your hands, and out of each fingertip, leaving your muscles warm and relaxed.

Breathe as the light flows over and around your neck and the back of your skull, leaving every muscle relaxed and warm. The light swirls around your jawline and chin. The light flows around your cheeks and your temples. It glows and warms the bridge of your nose and your forehead, finally closing up at the top of your head.

Your whole body is encased in a warm glowing light, leaving you fully relaxed. From this state, open your Witch’s eye. That inner eye that can see without sight. Open your Witch’s eye and see that you are standing at the center of a crossroads.

There are many paths, many options that flow out all around you. From this place in the center, you can see all the possibilities, all the options, all the choices. Take a moment and look closely at these roads. What do they represent? What are the options facing you right now?

As you feel ready to explore each path before you, notice some of the roads begin to fade away. You have thousands of choices, but there are only a few that are important for you to focus on right now. Begin finding the most important paths you might want to step on. Name these paths and watch how as you name them, they become clearer, more distinct, more revealing.

Perhaps there are now just a few roads left to explore. Choose one. Step forward, but don't bring your foot down on the path just yet. Let it hover there. Does this road truly call to you? Does the path light up? Do you feel compelled to strike out on this path and follow it wherever it leads? Is this road uncomfortable? Scary? Does it still call to you anyway?

If you feel compelled, take a few steps down the path. How does it feel now? Repeat this process, and when you've explored all the roads that pique your curiosity, note which pathway has the strongest pull.

Remember the road with the strongest pull. Call out its name. Now step back into the center of the crossroads. Breathe deeply, knowing you can return here at any time for further exploration.

Close your Witch's eye and step back into your body. Notice the seat on the sofa below you, the hard back of the chair you're sitting in, or the ground you're lying on. Take a moment to feel the flow of air in and out of your body. Wiggle your toes and move your fingers. Slowly, open your eyes and look around your ritual space. Tap the edges of your body and say your name out loud three times.

Take a few moments and journal about each path you walked down. Take special note of anything interesting, odd, challenging, or terrifying.

When you feel ready, step up to the altar. Pick up the last candle you lit, blow it out, and say: "Thank you to my guides and guardians from the

western realms. I have explored the unknown. Thank you for your wisdom."

Set down that candle, pick up the candle at the bottom of the tarot card, blow it out, and say: "Thank you to my guides and guardians from the southern realms. I have explored the unknown. Thank you for your passion."

Set down that candle, pick up the next candle, moving in a widdershins direction, blow it out, and say: "Thank you to my guides and guardians from the eastern realms. I have explored the unknown. Thank you for your clarity."

Set down that candle, pick up the last candle, blow it out, and say: "Thank you to my guides and guardians from the northern realms. I have explored the unknown. Thank you for your strength."

The work is done. Blessed be.

Well, the work is almost done. You did the hard work of setting aside time and recording a trance (or having another person guide you through it). You lit candles and imagined a crossroads with multiple paths to follow. Then you dared to step onto a path or two, testing the roads, and seeing which one called you.

The next part is tricky. The work of the "active" ritual is completed, but now it's time for you to sit with the post-ritual results. This might take a day or a week. You may have to repeat the ritual a few more times. You might find your answers coming to you in dreams or in an email that suddenly arrives from a person you haven't thought about in a while, but there will be a clear answer relating to the paths you stepped out on. This is the most important part of the ritual, really, because it's the calling making itself obvious to you.

Embracing the Tower: A Demand Ritual

In a traditional tarot deck, the sixteenth tarot card in the major arcana is called the Tower. The imagery often shows a towerlike structure being struck by lightning. Part of the building is in flames and there are people falling out of the windows to the ground below. The tower is often surrounded by a roiling sea, representing the uncertain emotions that major, unexpected changes bring to your life.

This card is not a warning; it is an announcement that the trouble is already here. The journey has already started, and it isn't likely to be what you expected. It might feel like you've just had the rug pulled out from under you. Your whole life is upside down. The change could be traumatic or joyful, but it is intense and immediate.

This is also the energy of the demand.

To prepare for this ritual, find an image of the Tower tarot card that you really love and set it in the center of your ritual space. You will need to be alone and undisturbed for at least an hour for this ritual. You will need a flat surface where you can create your altar, building around the tarot card. There is no specific time of day or night to perform this ritual. The event has already happened, so perform this ritual when you can.

Supplies: Your favorite Tower tarot card, a glass-encased white candle, a journal, and a pen.

Set Up: If possible, before setting up your ritual space, take a cleansing bath or shower. Use the time you are bathing to release anything from your spirit body that doesn't serve this work. Let it flow off your body and down the drain. Use a salt scrub to lightly exfoliate your skin and slough off anything from your physical body. If you are experiencing grief with this demand, you may want to incorporate the Grief Ritual in chapter 6.

Once you've cleansed yourself, place the Tower card in the center of your altar with the glass-encased candle next to it. Ground yourself by using one of the techniques listed in the introduction or in your favorite way.

Ritual: Light the candle and say: “I call upon my guides and guardians. I call upon my ancestors who have faced similar challenging times. I call upon those who can best guide and support me. I face the unknown. Please bring your strength, clarity, and wisdom to help me find solid footing on my path.”

Take a moment to breathe. Let your inhales and exhales happen as they want. Focus your eyes on the candle flame. Feel the support of your guides and allies surrounding you. As you focus on the flame, visualize it getting bigger and surrounding you with its glow. Feel yourself held by the warmth of your allies. Let it lift you up and give you comfort.

As this happens, allow yourself to take note of any messages, images, or feelings coming through. Is there any wisdom or information being offered to you right now? Take out your journal and write down anything important or vital.

When you feel ready, set down your journal and move on with your day. Leave the candle and tarot card out for as long as you can. Leave the candle burning only if it is safe to do so.

Light the candle anytime you need guidance or support from your allies.

The next part is tricky. You are in the rite of passage and the next few steps may be challenging. You may not even *know* the next steps. Now is the time to reach out to both your human and spirit allies to get you through. Connect with those who have been through this rite themselves as potential helpers to give you tips and pointers on how to create a map for the best way forward. Pay attention to your dreams or other synchronicities happening during these times.

After the Calling: The Preparation

In the best-case scenario, if the catalyst comes as a calling, when you can turn your ear to the great below, there is some time to prepare. In most

traditional cultures, there's a prescribed course of study, a level of work that must be achieved, and certain steps that must be completed for a rite of passage to begin.

Returning to the story of Inanna for a moment, once Inanna makes the decision to go into the Underworld she prepares for her return by counseling her dear friend on how to petition the other gods for help, should Inanna need it. Inanna also prepares herself by wearing the full regalia afforded to her as queen. She prepares by wearing the status symbols of jewelry and clothing.

This is also true for you when you step into a rite of passage. You can prepare. You can ready your mind and body. You can enlist the aid of your allies, friends, and spiritual guardians to help you along the way. It might feel like you go through these things alone, and in certain ways you do, but you often have more support than you think. Imagine the Fool card again from the tarot. The Fool is the one embarking on the journey; in the Fool's case, literally walking off the cliff into the unknown. It's the Fool's decision to walk off the cliff, to turn around at the last moment, or to grow wings on the way down. Right alongside the Fool, though, is the little dog. The Fool's ally. If you look at the card more closely, you can see the Fool has a little pack. You might imagine there's food, directions, or GPS locators tucked into the kerchief. The card might show a fool, but the Fool isn't stupid.

As a modern-day example, imagine you are getting your driver's license. You've made the decision that you want or need your driver's license. Now you must go through the steps of preparation. That might look like finding a person willing to teach you to drive, filling out paperwork to get a permit to drive, studying the rules of the road, and making an appointment to eventually take the test to prove what you've learned.

Packing Your Backpack: A Preparation Ritual

Like the Fool, you need to spend time planning what you'll need on your journey. Of course, what you bring with you and what you leave behind is

largely dependent on where you're going. This ritual is deceptively simple, but the catch is that you must be mindful of the fact that your backpack won't hold much.

There's no trance to record or altar to set up, but there is a time limit. The first part of this ritual must be one hour.

Supplies: A sheet of paper, a pen, a place to write, and an ally. The representation of your ally could be a picture of a deity you work with, a trusted best friend who always gives you great advice, a candle dedicated to the mystery of it all, or whatever feels right for you.

Set Up: As before, take a cleansing bath or shower. As you do, think about the path of your calling. Say out loud: "I am stepping out on the road. This road is called _____ (getting my driver's license, initiating into a coven, writing a magickal book, getting married, or whatever your calling is)." Repeat this phrase several times. Keep the representation of your ally close by, close enough that you can see or touch them easily.

Ritual: Pick up your pen and begin writing a list of words, whatever words or short phrases come to you, about your calling. If your calling is to embark on a spiritual pilgrimage, to visit a specific region of the world or sites that are sacred to your magickal practice or tradition, your list might contain words like: passport, magick, book a flight, dog-sitter, stone circle, scared to fly, never traveled by myself, how much does it cost, etc. Fill the paper with words connected to your calling. Any words, all the words. Don't think about them; just write and keep writing.

When your page is full, look at what you've written. Take it all in. This is the magick of your calling turned into words. Soon enough you'll turn those words and phrases into actions. But for now, look at them all.

Next, circle ten words or phrases with the most importance. Note that we didn't say "most doable" or "easiest to complete." Just circle ten words that seem the most *important* for your calling.

Turn your piece of paper over and rewrite your ten words. Thank your ally for witnessing your work.

The work of this ritual is over. Blessed be.

You might have figured out by now that the work of the ritual might be done, but the work of this stage isn't. You'd be correct. In fact, it's just beginning. Remember when we said you had to limit the ritual to just one hour? There's a magickal method at work here; it's about intuition. Circle your ten words and then leave them alone. Put them in a nightstand, affix them to your refrigerator door with a cute magnet, or place them on an altar. Don't overwork or overthink them. Leave your list of words and phrases alone for a few days.

Here's the real reason to keep this ritual short and to the point. It's important for your mind, your magickal mind, your intuition, to turn over your list without any conscious input from you. Your ten words might pop into your brain like earworms whispering, "Passport, passport, passport," or maybe you'll suddenly see an article about Stonehenge on your social media pages—that's all well and good. Take those synchronicities as signs that you're on the right path and your rite of passage is well and truly begun, but don't engage with them. *Read that part again*. For now, just for now, let your magickal mind mull over the words internally. Ignore the Stonehenge article. Notice that it's there, but refrain from reading it.

If you can, let a week go by. Now return to your list and refresh your memory by reading your ten words aloud. Ready? Grab your magickal books, travel guides, study notes; click on all the bookmarked pages you've been collecting; call your best friend; scour the internet; get a tarot reading; email your astrologer; gather as much information as you can about your ten words. Work them one at a time or all at once, but work them thoroughly. What's their definition? Which language are they from?

Which airlines flies directly to England and what's the best way to get to Stonehenge from the airport? Do as much research as you can on your ten words. But—and this is a big but—focus only on your ten words. If one of your word phrases was "flights to England," just look that up. You're not booking the trip just yet, so you needn't go down the rabbit hole of comparing the cost of every flight or contacting every rental car company in Wiltshire.

Magick and practicality often overlap. Making a list can reduce anxiety and help a person organize their thoughts, and eventually their tasks, more efficiently. A spell, petition, or incantation are words strung together to accomplish a specific magickal aim. The list of words and phrases you created represent the most important parts of your calling to research. This is your magick spell taking shape. You wrote the words and then sorted them, even if you didn't understand why you were doing that at first. That's the intuitive, magickal part taking over. To be sure, you may end up doing more research. You might want to explore other avenues before settling on a course of action. That's what the remaining words on your piece of paper are for. If you finish working through the first ten words and phrases and decide there's more, pull out your paper and circle the next ten most important words.

For the overthinkers and overachievers in the crowd, you don't *need* to work every word on your original sheet of paper. In fact, we strongly suggest you only concentrate on the first ten. Let the process flow naturally.

After the Demand: The Preparation

When the catalyst comes in the form of a demand, when you are thrust out of the comfort of your home into the dark forest, when life circumstances are foisted upon you, you have little to no time for preparation. You step into the rite of passage without a map or clarity on what to do next.

Looking at the tale of Vasilisa, the young girl was sent into the woods with only her bravery and her dolly to help her along. She didn't choose to

step into the darkness, but she took one step after another, trusting her wits to get her where she needed to go. There was no time to prepare, but she jumped into the moment and took faithful action.

This is true for you when you find yourself in a rite of passage you don't really want to be in. You may not have time to pack your bag. The moment happens. Imagine the Tower card; the change has happened and it may feel like the world is crumbling around you. You can't turn back. Your task is to take the steps to move forward and find your way through the rubble.

As a modern-day example, imagine you have been unexpectedly fired from your job. You are given time to pack your desk, handed your last check, and sent home. The moment of preparation doesn't come. You don't get to move into this rite of passage by stepping into the shallow end of the pool, slowly sinking into the newness of being in the water. Instead, you have been pushed into the deep end, the water shocking your system, and you have no choice but to swim or drown.

And, much like the dolly of Vasilisa, you may be more prepared than you realize. There is often a hidden reserve of experience that allows you to find your way. It's as if your life experiences up to this point serve as preparation.

A Word About the Catalyst

The catalyst isn't always the road you want to follow, but it's often the road you need to walk. If there's fear there, that's not always bad. If there's a certain amount of trepidation, that's okay, maybe even preferred. The calling tells you you've already started a rite of passage, even if you don't know it. Joseph Campbell, a mythologist, professor, and philosopher, said, "If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living." [6]

Campbell's quote could be rewritten to say, "If you follow your fear, you put yourself on a kind of track," or, "If you explore the deep, wet cave instead of the nice garden path with little solar lights pointing the way, you

put yourself on a kind of track." The calling often comes with the warning "Beware! Here be dragons." Having said all that, the road you choose, or maybe the road that chooses you, can be joyful and easy too. Don't overlook that road just because you think you must suffer through your rite of passage.

Stage Two: The Ordeal

Every rite of passage has an ordeal. You will be challenged in some way, shape, or form, and it's that challenge that determines whether or not you transition from one phase to another, held in a new status by the community you are a part of.

The ordeal isn't just one thing. Because rites of passage are so vast, personal, and different, there are several substages that happen during the ordeal process. Each segment offers their own unique challenges. You know the old expression "It's always darkest before the dawn"? Some rites of passage are like that. You have to go through all the steps, no matter how much you try and avoid them. The ordeal itself is the big test. In fact, when most people think of a rite of passage, they are thinking only about the ordeal process. It is the meat and potatoes of the rite of passage dinner.

The distinct phases that make up the ordeal are:

- Dissolution
- Completing the tasks
- Tests of courage and/or knowledge
- The ritual
- Resolution
- Introduction to community
- Integration

Sounds like a lot? That's why these are called rites of passage, not "a fun afternoon of passage."

In any number of cultures and communities surviving today, there are stories of ordeals one must go through. In the Welsh myth "Taliesin," we learn that Gwion Bach must undergo several magickal transformations and avoid being killed by the Witch goddess Cerridwen.[7] Gwion's rite of passage concluded when he survived the ordeal, was born a second time, and later grew into the magician, counselor, and mage we know as Taliesin.

Here is our retelling of the story:

> *Cerridwen and her husband, Tegid Foel, lived at Llyn Tegid. They had two children: a daughter and a son. The daughter, Creirwy, was destined for a life of ease. Her brother, Affagdu, was not so fortunate. His life would be hard, and he would not be accepted into society. Cerridwen, being a good mother, consulted the books of fferyllt and decided to brew an elixir of inspiration and knowledge so her son could become the wisest man of all. That way, people would seek him out.*
>
> *Cerridwen knew this magickal brew would take a year and a day to be ready, but she could not keep the fire lit and the cauldron bubbling without help. So she enlisted the help of a blind man named Morda to stoke the fire. She also enlisted the help of a village boy named Gwion Bach to stir the cauldron three times a day. The Witch goddess went about her business collecting herbs for the brew. Every day she returned to the cauldron, adding in the items she collected and checking on Morda and Gwion.*
>
> *On the day the brew was ready, when the magick was at its most potent, Gwion grabbed his spoon and stirred the cauldron a final time. As he did, three drops of the elixir splashed onto his thumb. Out of instinct, he put his thumb in his mouth to stop the burning and consumed the magick of the brew. In an instant, Gwion had all the knowledge in the universe, and in that same*

instant, Cerridwen knew that the spell had been ruined for her son.

In a rage, the goddess flew after Gwion and he began to run. With his newfound wisdom, Gwion transformed himself into a hare and scurried about the land. Cerridwen transformed herself into a greyhound and bounded after him. Just as she was about to catch him in her teeth, Gwion spied a river and leapt into the water, transforming into a salmon. He swam to the depths of the river. Not to be denied her quarry, Cerridwen transformed into an otter and plunged into the water to capture Gwion. Just as she was about to grab him with her otter's claw, he jumped out of the water and transformed into a bird, flying high into the sky. Again Cerridwen changed form and became a bird of prey, flying after him. As her razor-sharp talons reached for Gwion, he transformed one last time into a kernel of wheat and landed on the ground amongst a field of grain.

Cerridwen flew to the ground, becoming a black hen, and ate all the seeds until she ingested the seed that was Gwion. As often happens in magickal tales, the moment Cerridwen ate the seed that was Gwion, she realized she was pregnant with him. For nine months, Gwion lay in the belly of the goddess and was sustained by her.

Cerridwen was angry. She thought she would kill the child, but instead, when the babe was born, she placed him in a small boat and sent him down the river. Sometime later (some say forty days, some say forty years), the small boat came to rest in a salmon weir, where a generally unlucky prince named Elphin found him. When he uncovered the boat and saw the baby, he remarked at the luminousness of his face and named him Shining Brow, which we now know as Taliesin.

Taliesin went on to become the best and wisest counselor to the kings of his time, being fully accepted in his new capacity as

bard and wisdom holder.

In this tale, we can identify seven distinct parts that make up the ordeal. They are:

1. Dissolution: At the beginning of the story, Gwion Bach is given the task of stirring the cauldron by Cerridwen. He leaves the safe environment of his home and village and is no longer part of that world; his sole focus becomes doing the work the goddess puts before him. In dissolution, you are no longer *this*, but not yet *that*. You have to let go and forsake your former self without knowing what your new life is going to look like. This step may be conscious, but it just as likely could be subconscious. The dissolution may be a tremendous discomfort in your life that you can't quite place.
2. Completing the Tasks: In the tale of Gwion Bach, he spends all day stirring the cauldron. He follows the instructions from the goddess. He completes the tasks given. In personal rites of passage, you face challenges or quests that must be completed to get through it. In order to step into the next phase, the next state of being, you have to complete the tasks laid before you. These could be logical steps of training or planning, but they could also be steps of mystery and unknown.
3. Test of Courage and/or Knowledge: Depending on how you view Gwion Bach's story—either through divine intervention or happenstance—Gwion ends up tasting the three drops of the elixir he has been stirring for Cerridwen's son. Immediately he is tested by being chased across the countryside, forced to shape-shift by an angry mother goddess. At some point, you have to prove what you know. Tests of courage or knowledge may be in the form of an actual test, but they could just as easily be a test of pushing your edges or boundaries. You may have to face a fear you didn't even know you possessed.
4. The Ritual: While the whole story of Gwion and Cerridwen could be seen as a ritual, the portion where he must change his shape from a boy

to a creature of land, sea, sky, and grain, resting in the womb of the mother is the ritual of transformation. In a personal rite of passage, there are magickal steps taken to shift your spiritual energy. The ritual section of a rite of passage is the whole purpose of this book: taking a potentially mundane life change and giving it spiritual significance.

5. Resolution: Gwion is reborn from Cerridwen. He has gone through the rite and is in his new form with new knowledge. This part of the ordeal is where you put on the mantle of that new title. Perhaps you possess the license, you have a baby, or you are an initiate of a Witchcraft lineage.

6. Introduction to Community: Finally, Gwion is found by Elphin, who calls him Taliesin. He is seen by the community as the new being, reborn, having survived the ordeal. It is at this time that you share your changes with friends, family, and relationship circles. In this part of the process, you may invite folks to help you celebrate or honor our new state of being.

7. Integration: Taliesin is accepted by his community and becomes known as the wisest magician and bard, serving the kings of the land during his time. Integration is the process of becoming comfortable with your new self and gaining mastery of who you have become. Sometimes this part of the ordeal lasts the rest of your life.

In the coming chapters, we offer you rituals that take place in several of these steps. A ritual can be done at any moment along the path of a rite of passage: before, during, and after. Where we offer one ritual in one place, you could expand it to ritualize any of the other steps that feel important, challenging, or celebratory.

Stage Three: Alone and Yet in Community

As you go through rites of passage, you can feel very isolated. It is an experience you seemingly go about alone, but that’s rarely actually true. As mentioned earlier, for every rite of passage a lone person goes through,

there are other folks connected to the same rite of passage. While you go through the rite of passage of being born, another person is going through the rite of passage of giving birth.

And even then, there may be another person who is responsible for the medical care of both the birther and the person newly born. There are family and friends waiting to celebrate. There are coworkers and neighbors all awaiting the announcement of successful birth. Each individual is impacted by the rite of passage, even though only one person is being born.

Rites of passage, in and of themselves, are a community function, so it makes sense that there are different impacts based upon where you stand in the rite. Let's imagine someone getting their driver's license. At first glance, this simple rite of passage seems to only impact the person studying for—and taking—the driver's test. They are the person who will pass or fail. They will face the ordeal. They will be the one who has to prove whether they are ready to step into the next phase of being a licensed driver.

However, imagine this same scenario as a parent who has been teaching their teenager how to drive. There may be fear for the safety of their child after becoming a licensed driver and the real-world dangers and responsibilities of driving a car. That same parent may also be going through an internal struggle of seeing their child growing up and gaining a certain level of independence. The parent might be feeling less important or needed by their child.

Then there is the larger community impact. The teenager's friends now have someone to drive them around. The family unit may be able to shift some responsibilities. An older sibling may take on the responsibilities of driving younger siblings to school. The impact of that one teenager completing their rite of passage creates ripples of changes with repercussions impacting many people around them.

Magickally speaking, this is why it's important to ritualize rites of passage. When you mark these moments as special events, you create

space to hold all these possibilities. You have a place in ritual to celebrate, to name fears, to speak your best wishes, and to give legitimacy to the shifts occurring due to this rite of passage taking place. The declaration to community that there is a new driver on the road and the holder of that license being seen in a different way, with different responsibilities, are the exact purposes of a rite of passage.

Stage Four: The Advisor

You often mistakenly think your rite is completed after you successfully survive the ordeal, but there is more to a rite of passage. The steps don't ever really end. There is follow-up and sometimes follow-through that must happen. After finding your comfort in a new state, you may find yourself in the role of advisor or initiator. In a familiar rite of passage, being the advisor may look like the antiquated practice of walking your daughter down the aisle. This could look like teaching your teenaged child how to drive, or perhaps holding the role of high priestess in the initiation ritual of someone stepping onto the path of Witchcraft.

Becoming the advisor or initiator is an often forgotten step of rites of passage, but it is a vital step. The gift must move, and magickally it is important that you pay it forward.

However, in most cases you are not taught how to be the advisor. You may not step into the role for many years or even decades. You know how it was for you going through the rite; you may remember what worked or what didn't work for you. This may help you to course correct or make different choices than those who served as your advisor. But, just like when you initially went through the rite of passage, you may feel like you have to figure it out alone.

This is where the full circle of a rite of passage comes into play. Now your rite is to learn how to be the initiator, the advisor. Comfort with this step comes from practice. The more you help others, the more you understand the process of helping others, the more capable of an advisor you become.

3. 1 Corinthians 13:11 (Authorized King James Version).

4. Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*.

5. Forrester, *Baba Yaga*, 170.

6. Joseph Campbell Foundation, “Follow Your Bliss.”

7. Phillips, *Lady Charlotte Guest and the Mabinogion*, 263–85.

three

BIRTH

Birth—we've all done it, and we might be responsible for helping birth happen for another human being. People don't really remember their births, so most will think of a human giving birth upon hearing the word. The topic of birth is a big one; it's wide and encompasses a lot of nuances and specifics. A whole book could be written about the magick and ritual connected with birth, from fertility to pregnancy to being born, but we've tried to fit all of that into one chapter.

Birth isn't all big bellies, smiles, and cooing babies. Having a baby can be a trial. Getting pregnant when a baby isn't wanted comes with its own set of challenges. Preparing to step into parenthood is a major life transition, whether you step into it fully aware or whether you got a surprise that will change your life.

There is the whole process of becoming pregnant and the rite of passage of carrying a baby. There is the process of adoption and making space for a child to increase the numbers of your family. There is the potential of a pregnancy not coming to term and facing the loss of miscarriage. There is the potential of ending an unplanned pregnancy and holding the loss of abortion. And, of course, there is the physical process of labor, delivery,

and welcoming new life into your existing life. Each step of the way, there is space to acknowledge and honor a different rite of passage.

As we wrote this section, it became clear that we were focusing on the person who becomes pregnant, the one that carries the baby. It is an easy thing to do, as pregnancy is something that just one person physically experiences. However, in some cases (perhaps many, if not most), there is another person involved with the journey of pregnancy.

And pregnancy doesn't necessarily mean that your intimate partner is the one who gets pregnant. Maybe you've chosen to have a child via surrogacy. Maybe your sperm or eggs are part of the pregnancy cocktail, or perhaps they are not. Perhaps the birth is not about your body at all. It may be that a parent has remarried and is starting another family. Becoming a sibling, especially in a blended family, can be particularly trying and difficult. There are so many ways that births happen and, doubtless, many lives are impacted.

However, we begin this section with the beginning: fertility. Along the way, we explore pregnancy, labor and delivery, abortion, miscarriage, and baby blessings.

What These Rites Have in Common

From fertility to adoption to labor to abortion, the rites of passage in this section all deal with parenthood. The joys and challenges of fertility, the physical ordeal of labor and delivery, and the anguish of miscarriage or relief of abortion stand as distinct and discrete rites. Each ritual is a rite of passage in and of itself.

Beyond the individual rituals, though, there is a common denominator at work here, and that is parenthood. Even in the rites for miscarriage and abortion, the questions swirling around center on the idea of parenthood, even if the circumstances are such that one doesn't become a parent. The actual rite of passage one is entering into is about their relationship to parenthood.

If you examine the idea of parenthood, you're looking at a real-life change. Instead of being responsible solely for yourself, your own well-being, your own wants and needs, you're choosing to put another human life ahead of your own. In fact, you might be choosing several human lives over your own. For instance, perhaps a partner wants to become a parent. Maybe a passionate weekend of consensual romping turns into an "oops!" moment and major life decisions must be addressed. One decision affects many lives.

Read that again.

One decision affects many lives.

That's the real rite of passage going on here. It's profound. Parenthood changes everything. Want to take a nap at three in the afternoon because your body really needs rest? Too bad, you've got to pick up Timmy from soccer practice. Date night? Oops! Sheray has a tummy bug, so no date night for you. Ready to go on that world tour? Oh, that's right, your three-year-old would hate living in hostels.

Do you remember when we talked about the stages of a rite of passage in chapter 2? We defined the stages as the catalyst, the ordeal, alone and yet in community, and becoming the advisor. These stages lead to integration, and it's the integration piece that rarely gets talked about.

The Catalyst. This is easy to identify: a person wants to become a parent, wants to avoid becoming a parent, or suddenly discovers they are pregnant.

The Ordeal. The ordeal is made up of the rigors one endures. This could mean labor, financial planning, or scheduling a termination appointment.

Alone and Yet in Community. The experience of parenthood can be a lonely business, especially in the first few years. That might sound like a strange sentiment, but more than 50 percent of parents cite feelings of loneliness and separation. And here we see the "alone and yet in community" aspect at work. If you've become a parent, you'll experience situations where friends seem to fall away, invites to parties stop, or you're unable to go on that weekend trip with your best friends from

college. You may even have to give up a job or leave a job you love for one that has more flexible hours or pays better.

The Advisor. But what about getting past those decisions and becoming the advisor? You've now crossed the Rubicon, as it were. You're different. You've come out the other side. And although there is no requirement for you to ever share your experiences, the time will undoubtedly come when you find someone in the same position as you. They might seek you out for counsel, or you might feel compelled to share your wisdom and experiences.

Simply put, your very identity has changed. You are part of a different group now. And that can be a real blow—or boost—to your self-esteem.

And, to be clear, whether you have been through an abortion or a miscarriage or you've resolved that parenting isn't right for you now (or ever), you're also in a club of sorts.

Fertility and Becoming Pregnant

A major rite of passage in anyone's life is having a baby. Getting pregnant changes your mind, body, and spirit. There is a way to step into the shift toward pregnancy with intention and magick as a support for your process.

Throughout the majority of human history, pregnancy happened one way. Today, that's no longer true. For sure, the time-tested method of two people coming together is still the way most pregnancies happen, but advances in medical technology and fertility treatments mean getting pregnant can happen a lot of different ways. Regardless of the biological and medical functions that allow for pregnancy, these rites of passage still apply. No matter the methodology, the desire to become pregnant is the same. The following rituals deal with the spiritual preparedness of fertility, not the actual way it happens.

When a baby is desired, it can become an all-consuming obsession. Some people spend years and hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to get pregnant. For some, the process is easy and doesn't require a single

thought, but for others it's incredibly painstaking and difficult, and it may never happen at all.

The decision to begin or expand a family is a rite of passage all on its own. Some folks get a chance to decide they are ready to take this step; others find themselves surprised by the impending change in family status. But when it's ultimately determined and the process has truly begun, a rite of passage is called for.

Awakening fertility and making space magickally for pregnancy can, and should, be included in any other steps you are taking, both the more traditional and the more medical options. Our bodies are only one part of the fertility process; our minds and spirits also have an important role to play.

Whether you are just starting the planning process, were surprised with pregnancy, or have spent years dealing with the struggle of infertility, the first magickal step is to make space. Spiritually, you will need to make space in your energy field. A baby brings its own energy into your body. Preparing for that shift can help the change come more easily. The second step is to call out to baby spirits to let them know you are ready and willing to host them.

One of our dear friends ritualized this process in her life by throwing her contraception away. She did so on her wedding night with her husband in a ceremonial and intentional way. As they took this step, they announced to the universe that they were ready to accept the spirit of new life into their lives. The two stepped into the process of fertility and conception together, ready to take on the gift of new life.

This friend did not get pregnant right away. In fact, she struggled with infertility for several years, finally opting for medical intervention. She now has two beautiful children, but the journey didn't go as she had wished and planned for, and that is sometimes part of the process.

After the acknowledgment that a child is wanted, a release of expectation is the next step and it is the hardest and most important step along the road of fertility and conception. Rarely do conception and

fertility go exactly as you might desire them to. There will be challenges and difficulties. Your process may look a lot different than you hoped it would. That's okay. There is no one right way to have a family.

There is also the decision about how to tell folks about your process or how to alert people to the fact that you are pregnant. There are some real-life reasons for not sharing the information that you are pregnant with the world. Many folks choose to wait until several months have gone by in the hopes that they are clear from any complications at that point. Sharing your journey through pregnancy is a way to include family and friends in your process. It can be joyful and it can be overwhelming.

The rituals in this section are for people of all situations. Gender doesn't matter. Relationship status doesn't matter. Growing your family and honoring fertility can be for anyone, of any gender, in any type of relationship, or in no romantic relationship.

Surprise! You're Pregnant! A Tale from Phoenix

I didn't plan on getting pregnant. A baby didn't really fit into my goals. When I was surprised with a pregnancy, I wasn't quite sure what to do about it. Although I was married and had a good job, finding out I was pregnant really shifted my life around. To be honest, I was terrified.

I was supposed to be going to belly dancing class, but my period was late, and I was paranoid. I took the test at a friend's house while waiting to go to class. I've probably spent hundreds of dollars on pregnancy tests in my life. This was the only time I received a positive test result.

At first, I thought it must be wrong. Maybe I didn't pee on it correctly. Maybe there wasn't enough pee?

Rather than go to belly dancing class, I went back to the store and bought another test. I drove home and immediately took another one. Yep, positive. I was really in shock. I was worried I was going to be in trouble, even though I was in my mid-twenties and married.

I was also a practicing Witch, as was my daughter's father. We quickly realized we wanted to make sure stepping into our pregnancy and the

impending baby was approached reverently and spiritually. At the time, we didn't know anyone else who had gone down the road of witchy pregnancies. We were the first ones in our friend group to get pregnant, and we were all pretty young. Our older friends and our parents hadn't approached their pregnancies from a rite of passage perspective, but I wanted to.

I had to carve out my own path on how to walk through my pregnancy and welcome the baby spirit into my life, unlike folks who plan to become pregnant and do the spiritual work ahead of time. My baby spirit forced her way in and I had to make room for her after she had already appeared.

Fertility comes when it comes. You might be able to plan for it, or it might come upon you in a surprise.

Fertility Ritual #1

This ritual is best performed during a full moon. Complete this ritual alone or with the partner(s) you will be embarking on this journey with. This ritual is best performed at dawn or dusk, and it should be done in your bedroom.

Supplies: One seven-inch silver candle, one seven-inch gold candle, a small wooden box, one large egg, mustard seeds, oak leaves, acorns, small scraps of green fabric, and a green permanent marker.

Set Up: Create a small altar in your room with all of the supplies listed above. All ritual participants should do a ritual cleansing before beginning this ritual process.

Ritual: All participants should ground and center themselves while standing at the altar. Call in any allies you want to help in this working. This may include deities of fertility or birth, such as Brigid, Frigga, Lady of Beasts, or another deity you are devoted to. You may also want to call on ancestors or any other spiritual allies you feel would help your pregnancy process.

Light the silver candle and the gold candle. Between the light of these two candles, begin creating a nest using the scraps of green fabric. This nest will need to be sturdy enough to hold the egg. Weave the bits of fabric together as tightly as you can. Once you have a solid structure, begin to weave the oak leaves and acorns into the nest. Visualize this nest holding the spirit of the baby you want to bring into the world.

When you feel ready, place the nest in the small wooden box. Pick up the egg and call to the spirit of your future baby. Speak openly and from your heart. Express why you are ready; speak to why now is the time. Call forth the right spirit for you right now. Draw the rune Berkana, which is the rune for birth and becoming, on the egg with the green permanent marker.

Place the egg in the nest and sprinkle it with mustard seeds. Sing, holding one note for an extended time over the egg, imbuing it with the energy of your future child coming into being. When you feel complete, place the box with the nest and the egg under your bed and leave it there until after your child is born. Once you bring your baby home, throw the egg into a stream, river, or other running water.

Fertility Ritual #2

This ritual is best performed during a full moon. It should be done by the potential parents only. This ritual includes consensual, mutually agreed upon sex with the assumption of insemination as part of the process. If insemination isn't possible during the ritual, partners should bring each other to orgasm. It is important to be clear about this part of the ritual before beginning. However, it is totally acceptable to plan on having sex, but to then change your mind once the ritual has started.

Supplies: A bowl of water, salt, a large quartz crystal, and an athame.

Set Up: Place all items on a small altar with the crystal in the center.

Ritual: Together, both potential parents ground and center, coming to a place of stillness, ready to perform this rite. One potential parent creates the ritual container by picking up the athame. Imagine blue fire coming out of the blade of the athame and spreading around the space. Face the north and send out that blue fire. Start to turn toward the east, letting the blue fire flow out of the blade as you move, creating a container between you and the outside of this ritual.

Continue to move in a circle from east, to south, to west, to north, drawing the blue fire along with you. Draw the blade up above you, closing the gap in the top of the circle and then dropping the blade to the ground, closing the gap below. Feel yourself contained in electric blue fire of protection and fertility.

Invoke any gods or allies you want to help guide this process. Speak aloud and openly, asking for their support as you prepare to bring a baby into the world.

Come back to the altar. Each partner should place three scoops of salt into the bowl of water, stir the water with the first two fingers of their dominant hand three times, and then draw a pentagram in the water. Each partner then sprinkles the other with the salted water as a cleansing and preparation of their bodies as temples.

Together, pick up the crystal and speak about the shifting of your family and the growth of family you are ready to take on. Talk about the baby spirit you want to invite into your life. When you both feel ready, begin to speak out loud to any baby spirits that may be ready to come into your life. Call out to the spirit and let them know you are ready to receive them. Hold on to the crystal to help hold and foster that baby spirit.

The partners should now engage in sex. The act of sex might be about procreation, but it is more important to remember this ritual is about the union of energies. This ritual goes beyond gender dynamics. As you engage with each other, remember your connection to each other and why

you are undertaking this ritual to begin with. It is a development of love. Keep the crystal on or close to your bed. Anytime you engage in sex after this ritual, keep the crystal with you.

When both participants feel ready, thank the spirits or allies that you called into the circle. Ask for their continued guidance after the ritual ends.

One partner should pick up the athame and use it to cut open the blue fire circle that was created. Complete this process in reverse order, starting below, then above. Move to the north, the west, the south, the east, and back to the north. When the circle is opened, clap your hands three times.

Adoption

A family comes together in many ways, and the process of adoption is a unique rite replete with its own challenges and celebrations. The road to bringing home a child through adoption is not an easy one. There is a lot of red tape and bureaucracy that has to be dealt with. It’s also not an inexpensive process.

Adoption isn’t a one-size-fits-all rite. You may be looking at adopting a newborn baby. Perhaps you have been a foster parent and want to take the next step with the child who has been with you for a long time. Maybe you are looking to bring older children into your home. Although the legal process for these may be similar, the energetic differences are striking.

For some folks, the choice to adopt comes after years of trying to get pregnant. Wanting to have a family and bring a child into the family is a strong desire. Adoption may be your decision after a struggle with infertility. Adoption might be chosen over procreation, based on a desire to care for a child that needs a loving home.

With all of that being said, the reason for adoption is irrelevant. No matter what leads to the decision to adopt, the first step is to create space in your life for the spirit of a child.

Adoption Ritual

Find a space in your home you can turn into an altar that will stay up throughout the adoption process. This could be in a small corner of your home where it won't be too obvious or you could place it in the middle of everything; it really just depends on your living situation and what would be best for your life. This ritual should be done by anyone and everyone who will be calling in a new family member. Think about all of the people who will impact this child's life. Siblings-to-be may want to draw pictures or write poems for the altar. Grandparents-to-be may choose to share their hopes for their grandchild's future. Aunts, uncles, co-parents, and anyone who will influence and love this child can participate. The ritual can be done at any time of the month, but it should be done as close to the full moon as possible.

Supplies: A printout of your adoption application or any legal documents, a seven-inch glass-encased yellow candle, a large piece of paper, a magazine or printed images of families and the life you want to create, glue, scissors, and a bowl of dried rosemary.

Set Up: Gather all the items for the ritual and place them where you will end up keeping your permanent altar.

Ritual: All participants should hold hands and breathe together. Take a moment to come to your center. When everyone is ready, one participant needs to speak aloud your intention. Be clear and specific about what you are calling in; you may want to determine your intention ahead of the ritual. Light the candle when you have finished speaking.

Go through the printed images or magazine and gather all the pictures and words that meet your intention. Lay the images out on your blank piece of paper and begin to glue them down.

Again, speak your intention out loud while holding your adoption paperwork and newly made collage. Together, say the following:

We call forth a new member of our family
We open our hearts and our home to you
We call forth the perfect match for our lives
We open our hearts and our home to you
We call forth the child that needs our love
We open our hearts and our home to you

Lay the adoption paperwork under the candle. Sprinkle the candle and paperwork with dried rosemary. Place the collage near the candle. All participants say: “We are ready. Blessed be.”

Snuff out the candle. Light it as often as you feel called to throughout the adoption process. If you burn through the candle, get another yellow candle to replace it and repeat the candle-lighting process. You can always repeat this ritual with the same participants or with folks that couldn’t attend the initial ritual. Working and reworking a ritual can go a long way toward strengthening the magick.

Labor and Delivery Blessings

You may have heard the term Blessingway as a ritual held for a pregnant person preparing for the labor and delivery process. We encourage folks to change their language around this ritual. The term Blessingway comes from Navajo healing ceremonies; it is a specific tradition of this tribe. The Blessingway rituals are used for several different types of healing and magickal work, ease with labor and delivery being just one of them. But it is a word that calls upon a specific indigenous practice, and it isn’t appropriate for those not a part of this community to use.

With all of that being said, we will refer to this type of rite of passage as a birth blessing. This takes away any cultural appropriation and leaves space for the person giving birth to be of any gender. The idea of a birth blessing is to perform magick and ritual to help the labor and delivery process, both for the person giving birth and for the baby being born.

Although labor and delivery is a natural and normal human process, it is not without complications. Performing a ritual to bless delivery, ease pain, and smooth the road of this transition can help.

Many traditions across the world have superstitions and rituals to help aid the labor and birthing process. Often objects from the sea are used as talismans for smooth labor. In the South Pacific, women were known to rub their pregnant bellies with the smoothed side of a cowry shell. In Norway, women in labor drank a potion made from the outer shell of a sea heart. Small amulets were made in ancient Egypt for laboring women to hold on to. Dedicants to the Roman goddess Juno would untie knots during the labor of a pregnant woman to help loosen up the delivery. In Turkey, the evil eye and hand of Fatima help protect pregnant people and newborn children. Magickally taking care of those in the birthing process is something very human.

Lead Up to Labor and a Birth Blessing: A Story from Phoenix

I discovered a troubling thing while I was pregnant. It felt like every single woman who had given birth wanted to share their horror story with me. On the one hand, I appreciate people sharing their stories as a way of helping alert another person about what can happen, the hard things that aren't common knowledge. Knowledge is power, after all. And I also understand why telling the tale of overcoming a physical hardship is like a badge of honor.

However, there were a few women who shared their stories with me in a way that felt almost cruel. They didn't do it to inform me what to be aware of or what to prepare for. They did it as a way of being mean, as if their negative experience needed to be everyone's negative experience. Any time someone shared a story with me—good or bad—my response was, "Well, I only have so much control, but my plan is for as much ease as possible." One coworker responded to this by telling me, "I didn't go through thirty-six hours of hard labor and a C-section so you could have an easy and

quick labor and delivery." Honestly, it felt like she was trying to level a curse on me.

If you find yourself in the "family way" and there's suddenly a line of women wanting to share their horror stories, remember it is more about them than it is about you. Labor and delivery don't always go as planned, but that's not a shortcoming on the person giving birth. The biggest challenge in the birthing process is to stay open to the flow of what your body needs and what your baby needs.

And I'm not gonna lie, the labor and delivery processes are also a bit scary. Physical pain is hard, and fear can make pain worse. Fear is the worst thing to hold on to when going through the process. A tool I used for my laboring was the recitation of a poem written by Jhenah Telyndru, founder of the Sisterhood of Avalon, from her book Avalon Within. *She didn't write this poem for labor and delivery, but it was (and still is) one of the most beautiful pieces of poetry I've read. It spoke to me on a really deep level. Reciting the words was a comfort.*

To Part the Mists
By Jhenah Telyndru
The path to the top of the Tor
Is also the spiraled way to the woman within
A journey of growth, empowerment,
And self understanding
Voyage to the Source … the Center … the Goddess …
She whose Name can only be found in the silence of the soul
Delve into your darkness … enter your pain
Conquer your fears …
Call the Barge to take you
To the Holy Island of Healing which resides within …
And emerge renewed

The Mysteries of Avalon are alive

Her Apples are red and sweet …
Do you dare take a bite?
Become the Woman you were born to be …
Remember …

As the pain of labor felt too much to bear, I would recite this poem to distract my brain. It worked for a very long time, but eventually when the poem failed to distract me, I would repeat to myself, "This is only a moment in time." This sentence helped me to remember the amount of time I would spend in the labor process would be very short indeed compared to the time of the rest of my life. The process of developing a chant can be incorporated into any birth blessing ritual.

My own birth blessing ritual was very simple and sweet. I didn't know very many witchy women who had given birth, so I invited the women who were closest to me to attend my ritual. Each person was asked to bring an item I could place on an altar in the hospital room. We created sacred space and then one of the priestesses of the ritual led us on a guided meditation where we visualized ease in labor, swiftness in delivery, safety for me and my baby, and deftness in medical staff. We then shared food, and each woman shared what their altar item was and why they brought it. It was a beautiful day.

My labor and delivery were very easy and fast, in the scheme of things. My hard labor, pushing and all, was a total of almost two hours. It was as I planned and desired. I do believe my ritual, chanting, and meditation in my birth blessing helped the flow of my labor. But I was also prepared for it to not go my way, and I was willing to do things differently if needed.

Birth Blessings

A birth blessing can be done in combination with a more traditional baby shower. However, a birth blessing focuses more on the healthy process of labor and birthing. Ideally, birth blessings take place with those who have

given birth in attendance to help guide the pregnant person into their next phase.

A baby shower incorporated with a birth blessing is a unique opportunity where you can use the energy of all the people assembled to help create an easeful labor and delivery. People who attend a baby shower want to see the mother safe, the baby healthy, and the partner cool and supportive throughout the labor and delivery process. Having a room full of supportive and encouraging people is good magick! Take advantage of that.

A birth blessing ritual can be done covertly so that no one would suspect it is actually Witchcraft. Conversely, you can create a birth blessing so witchy that it might make some of your open-minded relatives uncomfortable. The choice is yours. What is important from the ritual of birth blessing is collecting the power of ease and health to support bringing new life physically into the world.

Birth Blessing for Witches, Pagans, and the Open-Minded

This ritual is written for a baby shower gathering of folks who are either Witches and Pagans themselves or are open-minded to participating in a ritual. The sacred space creation has been left vague and open. Please create sacred space in your favorite way or in a way that would be pleasing to the person who will be experiencing labor and delivering the baby.

This ritual should be led by the party host or a friend or family member. The person who will be going into labor should not lead this ritual; they should get to rest, propped up and comfortable in a seat of honor.

On top of the regular gifts that may be requested at a baby shower, encourage participants to bring altar items that would be safe and allowed at a hospital or birthing center. These items should be selected carefully with the intentions of ease, health, and smooth transition as the baby is born.

Supplies: A large rose quartz crystal, guests' ritual objects, body markers, and a comfortable place for the pregnant person to sit.

Set Up: Create an altar with all the gifts on the table, the crystal in the middle, and the pregnant person nearby. If there are any other objects important to creating sacred space in your tradition or by your preference, have those items available on the altar space too.

Ritual: Create sacred space as you desire. Call in any deities and/or ancestors you may want to help support this work. Ideally, all pieces of creating sacred space will be shared with the participants.

Ritual Leader should invite participants to ground and find their center, then invite each participant to briefly share the object they brought for the altar and why they brought it.

When this is complete, Ritual Leader should pass the crystal around the room. Participants should be encouraged to hold the crystal in their hands for a few moments, whisper blessings to it, and send energy into it that the laboring person can use when they need reserves to pull on.

At the same time, participants waiting to receive the crystal are invited to come up to the pregnant person and write a blessing for health and ease on their body (with permission) wherever the person wants to be written on. Symbols can be drawn, words written, or simple hearts placed on their skin. The people drawing symbols should share positive labor stories and verbal blessings to the pregnant one.

This will all take some time. As people finish up offering their blessings, shift into a song of your choosing or the following chant:

Healthy mother
Healthy babe
Easy labor
For grace we've prayed

Let the chant go on until voices come to stillness on their own. Gather up the ritual items that have been shared and offer them to the new family. Open the sacred space and celebrate the rite with cake!

New Child Showers

In our modern world, it is common to have a party before a baby or adopted child is brought home in order to celebrate the rite of passage, but this party also helps the new parents have enough stuff to take care of a baby's needs. Having a child is expensive; the gifts received from a baby shower can ease some of the financial squeeze.

Baby showers are often thought of as events for women, but more often than not, a woman isn't going through the event of having a baby on her own. Including partners and co-parents in a shower allows for all the lives going through this transition to be a part of the celebration.

A baby shower can take place for any family transition where a new child is coming into the fold. A baby shower can be for a child of any age. The following ritual is for folks who may not want a fully witchy ritual. It can be used for a new baby, a pregnancy, or an adopted child. This ritual should take place before the child arrives.

New Child Blessing Ritual for Everyone

This ritual can be used for any baby shower, no matter who is in attendance. At a traditional baby shower the mother-to-be rarely hosts the event. Typically, a friend or relative plays party host and organizes the day. This ritual is written for the host (or other representative) to lead. The words of this ritual do not need to be memorized or read from the book. They are meant as inspiration and a place to begin. Please use your own words to craft this ritual. This ritual is written for two expectant parents but can easily be adjusted.

Supplies: Three-by-five notecards, pens of different colors, and a small box to keep the cards in.

Set Up: Have all the supplies out and ready to use. If it is a large gathering, you may need to invite extra guests to help pass out objects as they are needed.

Ritual: Ritual Leader will speak to the attendees about the idea of a new child blessing, explaining the goal is to heap blessings upon the soon-to-be parents and the child coming into their lives.

Ritual Leader: “I invite you all to take a big deep breath together. Let’s all feel the excitement of this new life that will be with us soon. What a blessing it is for us all to be together today to celebrate this moment. Let’s look at the expecting parents and again, let’s all breathe together. What blessings would you offer this soon-to-be new family? What blessings would you offer for ease and a smooth transition?”

Ritual Leader and helpers now begin to pass out the three-by-five cards and colored pens.

Ritual Leader: “I invite each of you to share your blessings for the expectant parents by writing them down on these cards. We will each have the opportunity to share these with the expecting parents. Know that as you share your blessing, it will be magnified by each person in this room hearing that blessing and adding their own prayer and intention to it.”

Give space for attendees to write blessings. People are likely to start talking, laughing, or shifting energy during this part. When people begin to get distracted, Ritual Leader should call people back into focus and move to the next part of the ritual.

Ritual Leader: “Please stand up and share your blessings for these expectant parents, their new child, and this birth.”

Allow people time to share their blessings and as they do, collect the cards into the small box. When all participants have shared their blessings and all the cards have been collected, hold up the box.

Ritual Leader: “Inside this box are all our blessings. Let’s breathe together again, sending one final prayer of ease, love, health, and smooth transition into these blessings, amplifying their energy.”

Ritual Leader should then give the box of blessings over to the person(s) expecting and move on to the next part of the baby shower.

Baby Blessings

New parents want the very best for their children. This starts as soon as they are born. Around the same time Wiccans and Pagans started using the term handfasting to refer to Pagan marriage rituals, the term Wiccaning came into usage as well.

Many folks will be familiar with the concept of a christening; it is a baby blessing that marks the new baby as a member of the church. A Wiccaning is a similar ritual, except rather than marking the baby as a Wiccan or Witch, the process is a generic ritual that introduces the child's spirit to the parent's gods, with the caveat that the child will be able to choose their own spiritual path when the time comes.

When a baby is born, there are often many more people involved than just the parents. There are likely to be family and friends that want to offer their own magick and blessings to the new life. For many people, there is also a desire to do this in a way that connects into your spiritual leaning as a parent.

One of the things that happens during a christening is the designation of godparents. These are the people that are taking on responsibility for the spiritual guidance and well-being of the child. A godparent is signing up to be involved with the child for the rest of their lives. The true spiritual significance of this role is pretty serious. This role of spiritual guide has been added to some of the older Wiccaning rituals, where "goddess parents" were assigned to the child during the ritual. The role of a goddess parent, much like that of a godparent, is to help guide the spiritual growth of the child.

In truth, taking on this role and asking someone to take on this role is a big responsibility. This part of a baby blessing is not included in the rituals below, but you can add them into your rituals if you so choose. We

encourage you to take this potential relationship very seriously. This is forging a spiritual bond that will last many years. Even if the adults in the relationship fall out of favor with each other, the spiritual bond is still there. Choose wisely.

It is also important to note these rituals are not meant to bring the baby "into the Pagan fold." That's not really what we do; most Pagans and Witches give their children a wide berth when it comes to spiritual paths. Rarely do Pagans force religion on their children, understanding how personal religion is and wanting our children to have a choice when it comes to how they practice and relate to their spiritual life.

It's also important to remember the story of the Thirteenth Fairy when planning out a baby blessing ritual. Many are familiar with the Thirteenth Fairy as the story of Sleeping Beauty. A royal child is born and the king and queen invite the fairies to come and bless the baby. However, the Thirteenth Fairy never receives her invite. She is offended at the rebuff and shows up to the party anyway. Her gift is a curse against the child.

The moral of the story: be cautious and aware of who you invite and who you don't to any ritual involving the blessings of children. Make sure only those folks who wish you well and care about you deeply are invited to a baby blessing ritual. Don't invite a friend or coworker because you feel obligated. This is a place where obligation and niceness can take a back seat. If you wouldn't trust someone to take care of your baby in a pinch, really consider if they need to be invited to your baby blessing ritual.

Baby Blessing Ritual: Small Group of Witches

Ideally, this ritual would be performed during the first month after the baby is born. However, this isn't always possible. The next best threshold is before three months. Three months is a common timeline in many magickal traditions because it is believed that this is when the child first starts to fully incorporate into their body. This ritual can be done at any time and during any moon phase.

If this ritual can be performed outdoors that is best, but indoors will work just fine. The ritual is written for a small group that are all Pagans, Witches, or open-minded. You will need an altar space. The parents may choose to lead this ritual, or they may invite someone else to lead the ritual.

Supplies: Blessed water, a bowl of salt, incense, a wand, a seven-inch candle, string, and beads. In addition to these items, have an additional bowl of salt water handy with a sprig of rosemary.

Set Up: Place all items on the altar, which should be placed in the center of the space. Participants should sit or stand in a circle around the altar. A parent should hold the baby throughout the ritual.

Ritual: When everyone is gathered together, use the rosemary to sprinkle salt water on all the participants, including the baby. This is a cleansing.

Ritual Leader steps up to the altar, picks up the wand, and uses it to create a circle around the ritual space. Ritual Leader says, “With this wand I bind the circle.”

Ritual Leader sets the wand down and picks up the salt. They sprinkle that around the edge of the circle. Ritual Leader says, “With this salt I ground the circle.”

Ritual Leader sets down the salt and picks up the incense, lighting it. They walk around the perimeter with the smoke. Ritual Leader says, “With this smoke I charge the circle.”

Ritual Leader sets down the incense and picks up the candle, lighting it. They walk around the perimeter of the circle. Ritual Leader says, “With this candle I enliven the circle.”

Ritual Leader sets down the candle and picks up the blessed water. They walk around the perimeter of the circle, sprinkling the edges, but not using it all. Ritual Leader says, “With this water I bless the circle.”

Ritual Leader returns the blessed water to the altar. They speak to the parent(s) and the gathered guests. Ritual Leader says, “We are here to offer blessings for this new human being. We are all present because we represent an important person in the life of this child. It is an honor to be here and one that I hope we will all take seriously as the life of this being unfolds before us all. Before we move on to offer our own blessings for this child, we first call upon the guides and allies.”

A preselected participant steps forward to call upon the ancestors of the baby as a means of blessing, strength, and health. They end their spoken calling with the words “Blessed be” and all participants repeat the words “Blessed be.”

A second preselected participant steps forward to call upon the allies of the baby as a means of blessing, protection, and love. They end their spoken calling with the words “Blessed be” and all participants repeat the words “Blessed be.”

A third preselected participant steps forward to call upon any of the deities of the family unit. These would need to be predetermined before the ritual begins.

Ritual Leader steps to the altar and invites the parent(s) and baby to step up to the altar. Ritual Leader says, “Who brings forth this child for blessings from the community?”

Parent(s): “I do.”

Ritual Leader: “What name has the child been given?”

Parent(s) respond with the child’s name.

Ritual Leader: “We offer the blessings of the elements, spirits, and ourselves. We do this by understanding the spiritual path of (name) is their own path which will unfold in their own way.”

Ritual Leader picks up the salt and hands the bowl to a parent. Ritual Leader says, “We give (name) the blessing of earth. May you be held in strength, balance, and protection.”

A parent places a grain of salt on the child’s tongue. Ritual Leader takes the bowl of salt and returns it to the altar. They then pick up the incense

and hand that to a parent. Ritual Leader says, “We give (name) the blessings of air. May you be held in confidence, clarity, and song.”

A parent runs the incense smoke over the child. Ritual Leader takes the incense and returns it to the altar. They then pick up the candle and hand it to their parents. Ritual Leader says, “We give (name) the blessing of fire. May you be held in curiosity, love, and power.”

One of the parents carefully moves the candle around the child, keeping the candle far enough away that there is no concern of flame or hot wax being an issue. Ritual Leader takes the candle and returns it to the altar. They then pick up the blessed water and hand it to a parent. Ritual Leader says, “We give (name) the blessing of water. May you be held in wisdom, grace, and intuition.”

A parent sprinkles the child with the blessed water. Ritual Leader takes the bowl of water and returns it to the altar.

Ritual Leader: “Now we each have the opportunity to offer a personal blessing to (name).”

Ritual Leader passes out the beads, giving each of the participants one of them to hold. They then pick up the string and tie a knot in on one end while saying, “Take a moment to consider what blessing you would offer this being. What gift feels important to bestow on this child as they embark on their life? Take a moment to choose the blessing you will give and breathe that blessing into the bead in your hand.”

Ritual Leader leaves some space for people to consider their blessing. Suggest a few different ways to connect the blessing with the bead: energetically imbuing the blessing into the bead, breathing it into the bead, whispering the blessing to the bead, etc.

Ritual Leader: “I invite you to step forward and state your blessing to (name) while you add your bead on to the string.”

Each participant steps forward, stating their blessing to the baby and putting their bead on the string. When everyone has offered their blessings, Ritual Leader ties the string and says, “It is through the power of community that (name) will be guided and protected. It is through the

magick of our offerings and blessings that this child will be held. May their path lead them to health, happiness, and delight. Blessed be."

Ritual Leader places the string of beads around the child. They can be placed around the child's body or foot, depending on what is safest for the baby.

The person who called to any deities steps forward, thanks them, and dismisses them from the ritual. The person who called to any of the child's allies steps forward, thanks them, and dismisses them from the ritual. The person who called to any ancestors steps forward, thanks them, and dismisses them from the ritual.

Ritual Leader picks up the wand from the altar and pulls open the circle that was created, as if pulling back a curtain. When the energy has dissipated, Ritual Leader says, "This circle is open, but unbroken. May the power of these blessings go ever in our hearts. Merry meet and merry part, and merry meet again."

Baby Blessing Ritual for Everyone

This ritual is written so anyone of any faith (or no faith) can attend. If there is a need to leave Paganism out of a ritual, this is the one to use. Those "in the know" will spot the Witchcraft elements, but it will work for families of all faiths or for those more closed-minded. This ritual is appropriate for inviting the larger community of friends and family. It is best to have someone stand in as a Ritual Leader for this ritual. This could be a leader in your community, a family member, or a close family friend. This ritual can be performed at any time.

Supplies: A bowl of blessed water and a seven-inch white candle.

Set Up: Have a space where the parents and child can gather with Ritual Leader. Set up chairs for the viewing audience. Place the bowl of water and the candle in the center of a small table as an altar.

Ritual: Guests should be seated in the audience chairs. Parent(s), child, and Ritual Leader stand in front of the assembled group.

Ritual Leader: “We have come together today as the family, friends, and loved ones of this family. Today we offer blessings of love, abundance, joy, and health to this new human that has come into the world. Each of us are here because we are an important member of the community that supports this family. I invite you all to remember that participating in this blessing today is a sacred vow that you are making to this child. A vow that you support their success. A vow that you love them. A vow that you will help them to foster the best life possible. Thank you for being here and thank you for upholding that sacred vow.

“We also call upon those that cannot be with us here today. Our beloveds who are far away. Our loved ones who have passed away. Our friends who are here with us in spirit. We honor you and are grateful for your presence.”

Ritual Leader lights the candle.

Ritual Leader: “I will now invite the parent(s) of this child to introduce this new spirit to the community.”

Parent(s) step forward and hold the child, showing them to the gathered audience. A parent says, “Please welcome (name) into your lives.”

Ritual Leader picks up the bowl of water and turns to the family. Sprinkling the child’s head with some of the water, Ritual Leader says, “We offer blessings on this day to (name). May you find joy everywhere you look. May you find peace when you need it. May you find success in all that you work toward. May you find love anywhere you seek it.”

Ritual Leader turns to the gathered audience and says, “A child is raised by all those people who touch their life. It is more than a parent who holds influence on the development of a young person. At this time, we invite any of you who feel called to bless this child.”

Ritual Leader holds the bowl of blessed water for anyone that comes up to offer a blessing. This may take some time. Before moving on, Ritual

Leader makes one last call for anyone else who may want to offer a blessing to the child.

Ritual Leader, holding the bowl of blessed water, sprinkles the child once more. Ritual Leader says, “I offer this blessing on behalf of those who could not be with us today.”

Ritual Leader sets down the bowl of blessed water and invites the family to sit down. Ritual Leader says, “(Name) is blessed because of each of you. As we go forth today, let us each remember these blessings and do our best to see them come to pass for the highest good of all. Brightest of blessings to you. Blessings on this day and blessings on (name). And so it is.”

Loss of Pregnancy

Not all pregnancies make it to full term, and not all babies survive. Whether the pregnancy ended by choice, medical necessity, or unknown causes, it is a painful and difficult rite of passage to go through. Not all rites of passage are markers of happy events, which does not make them any more or less valid. A change in life is a change in life. Mourning the loss of a pregnancy at any stage is still mourning.

Our society makes it much easier to be open and transparent about the happy and joyful rites we go through, but it is so much harder to be open and vulnerable with the hardships and challenging moments we go through. For the most part, people invite others in to help honor their celebrations. However, people often mourn and go through their hardships privately. For more information on grief and death, see chapter 6.

Miscarriage

Miscarriage happens more frequently than many folks imagine. According to Mayo Clinic, between 10 percent and 20 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage. In actuality, miscarriage numbers are likely a little higher

than that because some happen during menstruation before pregnancy is detected.[8]

Miscarriages are the spontaneous termination of a pregnancy, usually due to chromosomal abnormalities preventing the fetus from developing as it should. It is rarely ever the fault of the pregnant person.

Those are the facts. The facts aren't all that comforting. The facts don't take into consideration the loss and the grief that accompany miscarriage. Beyond the physical symptoms, there is often a sense of tremendous loss. Often there's a sense of betrayal by the universe, science, the gods, and our very own bodies. Miscarriage, as common as it is, feels like a cruel and unwelcomed joke.

Rituals for miscarriage are hard. They tend to be private because folks rarely want to talk about miscarriage and no one wants to go through this rite of passage. The following ritual must be adapted for the circumstances of the moment. We're giving the scantest of details and suggestions and including a beautiful, haunting poem that can be read aloud and offered as a prayer.

A Ritual for Miscarriage

When all are gathered, form a close circle around the people most impacted by the miscarriage. This could be the formerly pregnant person, parents who were going to adopt, or would-be siblings.

Supplies: Favorite drinks and/or food and warm, soft blankets.

Set Up: Create a space that is comfortable and welcoming. Make sure the individual going through the physical miscarriage feels safe and as comfortable as possible. Make the individual comfortable. Bring calming and soothing teas. Bring their favorite foods. Tend a fire, turn on a heater, and make the room warm. Leave a door ajar or a window slightly open. This is a place for the spirits of life and death to move in and out of.

Ritual: Perhaps others share their stories of miscarriage. Perhaps there is hand-holding. Perhaps names of those not-to-be are spoken aloud, mourned, and keened over. Perhaps there's just silence. Perhaps there is a simple acknowledgment of lives not destined to be lived, of dreams and hopes that will not be fulfilled just now.

Tears are likely. Anguished wails may follow. Sobs and curses shouted to the heavens may fill the room. In this space, in this moment, for this ritual, let them ring out.

In the stillness that follows, these words may be read:

For A Miscarriage or Stillbirth Or Infant Death
By Starhawk
Mother of life,
Mother of death,
here is a spirit so new
that the gates of life and death
are just an archway in her dancing ground.
She has danced her way back to you.
Her passage is easy
but mine is hard.
I wanted to hold her living flesh
and feel her soft breath and her heartbeat.
(I nurtured her in my body;
I would have fed her from my breasts.)
I would have cared for her
and watched her first steps
and listened for her voice.
No other child that may come to me
will ever be what she would have been.
Nothing, nobody, will ever replace her.
Whatever healing I may find,
this loss will always be a part of me.

(Bless my womb, which has the power
to create life and death.)
Bless my arms
that would have embraced her.
Bless my hands that would have lifted her.
Bless my heart that grieves.[9]

The poem uses she/her pronouns. He/him or they/them may be substituted. The power of the piece is not in its use of pronouns, but in the heartfelt acknowledgment of loss, pain, and grief. Likewise, "Bless my hands" could easily be changed to "Bless our hands," and so on.

Bring the ritual to a close as feels appropriate, making sure the individual going through the physical experience is well cared for and has a comfortable place to sleep.

Abortion

The decision to end a pregnancy, whether due to choice or medical necessity, is rarely easy. Aside from the fact that this can be a difficult emotional decision, it is also a painful medical procedure. There are so many complicated and challenging feelings that come up with the decision to terminate a pregnancy. One of the most important steps a person can take when facing this choice is to reach out for support. Of course, reaching out for support sounds great, but most people who have had an abortion or have considered an abortion will tell you they agonized over the decision alone before ever talking to anyone else.

While abortion is still legal in the United States, in many areas of the country it's practically impossible for folks to get the care and support they need. Fortunately, there are resources available online. Many organizations work tirelessly to dispel myths about pregnancy termination and provide solid, unbiased, educational, real medical information and aftercare.

You have a choice, and you can end a situation that may be disastrous for your life. It's okay to feel relieved. And it is okay to be filled with grief and loss. If you are deep in grief, there are rituals that may be helpful for you in chapter 6. There is also a ritual for grief in that section that may be helpful for processing some of feelings that might come up with abortion.

Abortion: A Story by Gwion

I was thirty-four. She was nineteen. We held hands and walked into the abortion clinic for the appointment. I was scared. She was petrified. I stayed with her through the entire procedure. She never let go of my hand. Afterward, we sat in silence. I carried her to the car. When we arrived at her apartment, she asked me to make a little nest on the sofa with blankets and pillows and tissues and painkillers. I offered to stay. She asked me to leave. A few days later she came back to work. We never spoke about it.

To be transparent, I had nothing to do with this pregnancy. I was not the father. We were not intimate partners. We worked together. I saw the hurried trips to the bathroom and the telltale "green at the gills" look of morning sickness. I noticed the obvious and sudden absence of her boyfriend in the parking lot at lunch and after her shift.

Her parents raised her to be a "good girl." Church on Sundays, abstinence sermons, and a healthy fear of hell substituted for real education and frank conversations about sex and birth control and consequences. She couldn't tell her parents she was pregnant, and telling them she wanted an abortion was completely out of the question.

Her boyfriend was as unprepared for their pregnancy as she was. The words "Are you sure it's mine?" tumbled out of his mouth without thought for what he was suggesting. And in the next few moments, shocked, confused, and too concerned with his own future, he did what so many other men do: he abdicated his responsibility. He just didn't want to know. He said, "Do whatever you think is best."

In that moment, and in so many words, he said, "It's your choice." She confided in me that she knew he wouldn't marry her. There was no way

he'd go to her parent's house with the news. In a swirl of confusion and clarity, she knew that he was still planning on accepting his baseball scholarship and attending college out of state. There would be no couple's childbirth classes or accompanied doctor visits. No support. It was completely up to her. Her choice.

And so she made her choice.

Let me be frank with you. If you're a cisgender dude you won't ever have to make the choice she made. You might be consulted, maybe asked for your opinion. But when it comes to getting on the bed and putting legs in stirrups, that won't be you. No matter how willing you are to be a stand-up guy, you always have the choice to walk away. Sure, there's a cost to your choice; child support is no joke. Imagine how you'd feel if your choice to call it quits, walk away, and just pay a monthly fee was suddenly taken away and you were forced to stay with someone you'd just made a mistake with. That would suck, wouldn't it?

Imagine what it's like not to have a choice.

Speak up, gents. You might not realize it, but this is your fight too. Join the chorus of mostly women's voices. Declare it loudly. Protect a woman's right to safe, legal, accessible, affordable abortion and safe, legal, accessible, affordable forms of birth control.

Abortion as a Rite

Having an abortion is a rite of passage, and it is not one all people will experience. Not everyone can say that they have been pregnant, and not everyone that has been pregnant can say that they've lost a pregnancy. The rite of passage of becoming pregnant is present here, as is the rite of passage of losing that pregnancy. You are changed after going through the termination of a pregnancy, both physically and spiritually. You may not feel called to mark the transition with a ritual, but for many, ritualization of this shift is vital to having a healthy relationship with the loss.

There are two steps to the ritual for abortion. The first is before the medical procedure; the second is in the recovery time. Keep in mind the process of grief will not just abate once you complete this ritual. Sitting with your grief and going through your feelings with this loss may come up for many years to come. There is nothing wrong with that grief.

There is nothing wrong with a lack of grief either. You may feel totally relieved, happy, and clear about moving forward. This doesn't mean you are cruel or a cold person. It means the timing wasn't right and you made a good decision.

Pre-Procedure: Before your medical appointment, take some time to speak with the spirit who has come into your life. Let the spirit know you are grateful for their interest and the opportunity, but the time is not right. Express to the spirit why the time isn't right for you. Offer them a blessing and let them know that you will be sending them on their way. Depending on your emotional state, this could be a very easy process, or it could be extremely emotional and difficult. Make sure you have enough support as you go through it. If you are having an intense emotional reaction and find yourself really struggling, seek help from friends and loved ones or a therapist.

Before leaving for the procedure, draw the runes Laguz, Uruz, and Algiz on your body. You can do this with a body marker or eyeliner. Place the symbols anywhere on your body that feels comfortable for you. These runes are symbols for flow, strength, and protection. As you draw them on, focus on health and healing.

Post-Procedure: The post-procedure process is about healing yourself, body, mind, and spirit. Although abortion is a relatively routine medical

procedure, it isn’t an easy one. You may need several days to take it slow, relax, and heal. Use this time to be introspective. Journal about what comes through for you during this time. If possible, spend at least three days removed from your regular schedule. At the very least, make sure that you follow your doctor’s guidelines. When it is safe and advised for you to bathe, gently wash off any of the markings from the runes that may remain on your body.

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8. Mayo Clinic Staff, “Miscarriage.”

9. Starhawk, *Pagan Book of Living and Dying*, 212.

four

RITES OF LEVELING UP

All people go through transitions where they need to show up in their own lives more fully, take on more, or become a bigger, more powerful version of themselves. We refer to these rites of passage as “leveling up.” Think of it like a video game: at some point you’ve collected all the mushrooms, you’ve completed all the tasks, and you’ve beaten the pit boss. Now you get to level up! You don’t just go from level one to level two because you want to. You have to go through all the trials and tribulations, but once you do, you have more power, more access, and a greater ability to complete the tasks in front of you. If you make it to level ten and then go back and play level one, it’s ridiculously easy. This is much like life.

It’s important to state that “leveling up” isn’t just about achievement. We’re not talking about growing your income from one number to another or harnessing the power of the universe so you can buy a helicopter. Leveling up really refers to the notion of stepping into a more diverse, capable, dexterous version of yourself.

What These Rites Have in Common

At first glance, getting a driver's license is not at all like getting married. Moving into a new home or graduating might not seem like they have a lot in common. When you strip away the labels, though, what you're left with does have a unifying theme, and that's the notion of becoming something more.

The rites of passage that are occurring here are the rites of growth and becoming. Getting a driver's license can equate to responsibility and freedom. Graduating speaks to a level of mastery that had not previously been attained, and with that mastery come new layers of opportunities and respect. When you get married, you are seen as someone who has made an important long-term commitment. When we look at the stages of rites of passage, we can see them clearly here.

The Catalyst. The catalyst is in the drive, need, or expectation one sets to become something more. The preparation for this takes many forms, and in this case, it's the intention setting and imagining yourself as accomplished, completed, and on the other side of the rite.

The Ordeal. If you've ever planned a wedding, you know all about the ordeal. But seriously, the ordeal shows up not only in the studying and preparing and test taking, but also in overcoming the hurdles of self-doubt, creating a space to be teachable, being vulnerable, and opening to a new and bigger version of yourself.

Alone and Yet in Community. It's possible you'll be viewed as the expert, the one who became more, and still feel like a novice or even a fraud. With every iteration of yourself, with every task you complete, with any accolade you earn, there's a tendency to disbelieve your own worth and value. You might find yourself saying, "Well, I graduated 999th in a class of one thousand," but that doesn't take away from the fact that you still accomplished what you set out to. You might compare your successes to someone else's, and that's a fool's game. You *did* do that thing. You

passed the test. You moved into the home. You planned the wedding. You are creating the best version of you right now.

The Advisor. Becoming the advisor, although not a role folks will step into immediately, is present too. You may one day teach someone else to drive or witness the graduation of a young person you love. You may help someone else plan their wedding or become an officiant or parent of the bride. You may help someone else move or buy a home. You may be the trainer welcoming new employees and showing them the ropes. You are qualified, because of your experience, to guide others through the hurdles they might face, and if all goes well, make their rite of passage a little smoother. By the way, smoother doesn't mean easier or less arduous, but you might be able to let them know about the trials and tribulations that are likely coming their way.

Graduation

Going through a graduation ceremony is a rite of passage most people are familiar with. It is quite a Pagan ritual if you think about it. Folks wear robes and hats. There are speeches given by those who have gone through the process before. Words are said about the past and how to best prepare for the future. At some point during the ritual, there is a symbolic step honoring the rite; in this case, by moving the tassel from one side of the hat to the other or by getting a rolled-up piece of paper and a handshake. Friends and family give gifts, and often there are parties and celebrations afterward to honor the transformation.

Graduation happens repeatedly. Preschools often do graduation ceremonies for the kids moving up into elementary school. There are ceremonies for moving from primary to middle school and again moving from middle school to high school. People experience high school graduations and college graduations. And potentially it goes on from there: technical training, completing bootcamp, master's degrees, grad

school, doctorates, and so on. Each time, the leveling up becomes a bigger and more profound experience.

Most people can already see these steps as rites of passage. Many people have gone through at least a couple of them, if not more. This step of leveling up doesn't require explanation or Witching up. The rituals and ceremonies are already written. They already take place. We don't need to write rituals for this one because society makes it happen for us, but here's our ritual anyway.

Graduation Ritual

This ritual should be done after the formal graduation ceremony is complete. It can take place right before a party or celebration, but it could also include only the family members and loved ones who supported the graduate. This ritual can be performed each time your loved one completes another graduation milestone.

Supplies: None are needed, but a good meal or cake for after the ritual would be appropriate.

Set Up: This ritual takes place right outside the front door of the family dwelling. Make arrangements to deal with weather ahead of time.

Ritual: As the new graduate approaches the home, the family and loved ones should gather outside the door before entering the house, serving as a block between the graduate and the door. The loved ones should have smiles on their faces and, if they choose, should carry gifts or cards with money in them.

Each loved one speaks to the graduate, sharing a story or memory of how the graduate worked hard, succeeded, or overcame a difficulty during their school career. With each story, the loved one offers their gift or card to the graduate.

When everyone has shared their stories, a designated person should say the following, "We are all so proud of your accomplishment. We are all so

excited to see what the future holds for you. We now follow you over the threshold as you step forward into the rest of your life. Know that as we follow you across the threshold, we always have your back."

The group should part, making a space for the graduate to step over the threshold. Each loved one steps through the doorway following the graduate. A party commences!

Getting a Driver's License

People don't have many formal coming of age rituals in the secular world. There are religious rites, of course. Often, the first official marker that is given to young people—removed from biology—is learning to drive. Getting a driver's license is a sign of freedom and independence.

A driver's license is a big deal, but most don't really look at it that way. People take it for granted. Driving a car is like having control of a deadly weapon. Cars are dangerous; showing a young person how to safely handle one, and then deeming them ready to hold that responsibility on their own, is quite a massive act of trust.

This rite of passage is also totally optional. It is a choice to get a driver's license, and it is not one everyone will make. Our son didn't want to drive. He waited until he was eighteen before he got his license. Our eldest daughter couldn't wait to drive. She booked her own driving lessons and scheduled her own DMV appointments as soon as she was able. She was waiting for no one. And our younger daughter was somewhere in the middle. She wanted to drive, but she needed a lot more encouragement and prodding to complete all the steps of the ordeal. Each of their rites of passage to achieve this goal looked different.

Our family also lives in an area where you really do need a driver's license. Public transport is okay, but it's not great. If you want to get around, have a job, or even get to school, a car is a necessary evil. But there are plenty of areas—most of them in major cities—where you don't

need to drive, and getting a license is a rite of passage many will never undertake.

Having a driver's license doesn't mean you will drive. In order to drive you have to have access to a vehicle, which is not something everyone will have. And purchasing a car is another rite of passage. Learning to drive is being in the liminal space; you drive a car while you're learning, and yet, you are not considered officially a driver. You have some freedom, but you do not have total freedom.

This rite is repeated when you are a parent with a child going through it. As an adult you are even more aware of the danger and serious responsibility that driving holds. This transition may shift a relationship between parent and child; it is often around driving age when kids really pull away from their parents.

The ritual included in this section is a very simple ritual. Not every rite of passage requires a long and drawn out ceremony. Our youngest has never been interested in having long, drawn out rituals, so doing that with her would have been inappropriate for her path. But it was important to do *something* to honor the change in her life. The following rituals can be expanded upon if that is something appropriate for your life.

Phoenix, Won't You Drive My Car?

At the age of sixteen I was already a year into practicing Witchcraft. When I took my driver's test, I wore all my magickal jewelry. I wanted to have as much luck on my side as possible. Sadly, I didn't pass my test. When the portion of the test came where I needed to back up, I ended up driving onto a driveway—just a little bit, but enough to automatically fail the test.

Of course, I had practiced backing up … but not enough, clearly. I had to wait two weeks before I could take the test again. When I got home, I did a spell to pass the test, and I started practicing backing up with my stepdad every time we practiced driving.

When my second test date came, I only wore my most important piece of jewelry. I had done my spell for success, and more importantly, I had

practiced the skill I was weakest at.

I passed my second test with a perfect score. I don't remember my parents doing anything to acknowledge the event. But I did. I asked if I could take the car out on my own as a sign I was now a licensed driver. I picked up my two best friends and we went out to a Chinese restaurant for a celebratory dinner. For me, it was a clear celebration; I was now one step closer to being an adult.

Many years later, when my youngest daughter took her driver's test, I stood outside the DMV calling on her guides and allies to help her do her best. I held vigil and made a constant prayer that she would follow the rules of the road and be diligent in her driving. She passed!

She drove us home, and on the way we stopped at our favorite local coffee shop and toasted her success with decadently sweet drinks. She's not really into big flashy Pagan rituals, so she didn't want me to make a big deal about it. So, a toast with whipped cream and coffee was how we celebrated. Our coffee shop experience is the inspiration for the following ritual.

New Driver Ritual

This ritual should be done immediately after the new driver has passed their driving test. Have the new driver drive the car leaving the testing facility. I highly recommend going out for a treat, lunch, coffee; something that can serve as a "cakes and ale" celebration. On the way, express your pride in their accomplishment. Share how you watched them work hard to achieve this goal. Honor and celebrate them for the rite of passage that they completed.

New Car Blessing

This ritual should be performed as soon as a new car is brought home. By new car, we mean a new-to-you car. A used car, a lease, a loan, a full-out purchase: none of the specifics matter here. What matters is creating a

safe magickal container for the vehicle that will be a major mode of transportation.

Supplies: Bowl of salt water, dragon's blood incense, your athame, and a protection amulet you will leave in your car.

Set Up: Have all the ritual items handy near the car. Have all of the doors open.

Ritual: Light the incense and carefully use it to sain your vehicle. Use the smoke as a cleanser to clear the air. Be cautious to not let any burning pieces fall on the carpet or upholstery.

Set down the incense and pick up the bowl of salt water. Sprinkle the perimeter of the car with the salt water, cleansing the energy around the car. Then repeat this process inside of the vehicle.

Set down the bowl of salt water and pick up your athame. Step to the rear of your car. From the rear of the car, project your power through the athame to the middle of the front bumper and begin drawing an invoking pentacle over the entire vehicle. Imagine the top point of your pentacle starting in the middle of the front bumper. The pentacle encompasses your whole vehicle. In most cases, the pentacle you're drawing is imaginal, but you could totally draw an actual pentacle using water if your car is small enough or if you have a stepladder.

Call upon any guides, allies, or deities you work with for protection. Hecate or Hermes are good for protection and safety while traveling.

Affix the amulet to your car. Place any other magickal items in your car that will remain there.

The rite is done. However, this ritual can be repeated any time you feel it needs a bolster of energy. As an example, every time our family takes a long car journey, we repeat this ritual.

Chant for Success in Driving Tests

Use this chant when holding vigil for someone taking their driving exam. You can "recycle" this for any other testing too. The "your" in this chant is directed at the person taking the test. If you'd prefer, switch out the word "your" and replace it with the name and pronoun of the person you are chanting for.

I call upon your wisdom, I call upon your skill
I ask for your allies' guidance to press upon your will
May you pass with flying colors, may you shine bold and bright
May you achieve your goal today, success is in your sight.

Vehicle Protections

You are likely to spend a lot of time in your car. And, as we've mentioned, a car is a dangerous tool. Setting up some simple magickal protections can help you stay safe on the road, and it can help your car stay safe from being broken into or having repair issues.

Of course, none of these suggestions should replace being a safe driver, locking your doors, having proper insurance, and keeping up the required maintenance for your vehicle. Solid, mundane steps go hand in hand with solid magickal steps.

- Hang a mirror ball or evil eye amulet from your rearview mirror. This helps to keep negative energy off your car and yourself while driving.
- Regularly smoke cleanse or sain your vehicle. In the same way you might burn herbs, resins, or incense to cleanse your home, this can be repeated for your vehicle. Just don't do this while driving!
- Use a lucky amulet as a key chain. Use a horseshoe, an evil eye amulet, a pentacle, or any other symbol you associate with good luck and protection.
- Put a handful of salt, a sprig of rosemary, and as many basil leaves as you have seatbelts in a plain envelope. Seal this up and keep it in your

glove box. Replace and refresh at least twice a year or any time you feel like it needs updating.

• Draw large imaginal, symbolic invoking pentacles over your car any time you are taking a long trip or driving on a road that makes you nervous. As you draw the pentacle, call upon protection, safety, and awareness. Again, if your car is small enough or if you are particularly agile, you can trace the pentacle over your car using water.

• Draw large imaginal, symbolic invoking pentacles over your car any time you leave it parked long term or in a dangerous area. As you draw the pentacle, call upon protection.

Starting a New Job

Think about it: if you work at a typical nine-to-five job, you end up spending more waking hours at your job than any other place. Because of that, stepping into a new workplace is a big deal. Work takes up so much of your life, so it's a good idea to start it off on the right foot. Doing magick or ritual at the workplace is an easy thing to do. Magick can be done covertly, right under the noses of coworkers, without anyone knowing.

Any new job is a rite of passage, but the magnitude of that rite will differ depending on the rest of the circumstances. A first job is a huge rite of passage. Your first job in a field that you have been studying in is another huge rite of passage. A new job in a new industry is a huge rite of passage.

Starting a new job is a total change of energy. However, many might not look at a new job as a rite of passage at all. But it is a pretty big deal in the grand scheme of things. Starting a new job can be exciting or scary. It could be easy and totally within your wheelhouse, or it could be a big challenge that you have to step into. For the most part, people step into new jobs and workplaces without much ceremony, but we want to invite you to pause and acknowledge this rite of passage as it is happening.

When you start a new situation with a little bit of magick and ritual, you are also setting the stage for what you want to manifest in that situation. A little magick goes a long way. Remember, there's real power in walking into your new job with your head held high, feeling confident—not cocky—and knowing you are capable and competent. There's that old saying "start as you mean to go on," and it really applies here.

I'm a Big Kid Now: Phoenix Enters Corporate America

I was a week shy of twenty when I started my first corporate job. I'd been working at fast food restaurants and a shipping store, but my corporate job felt like my first "real job." I remember everything about that first day. I was so nervous in my black slacks and brown knit sweater.

When my new boss took me to my little cubicle and showed me my new digs, I just about jumped for joy. My own desk!? My own cubicle!? How cool is that! Looking back after almost two decades in the corporate world, I almost feel sorry for little nineteen-year-old me, but hey, what did she know?

This job made me an official adult. I had my own desk, my own pressed wood walls. I could hang up pictures and bring in a coffee cup to keep on my own desk. (Can you tell I'm a Taurus?) It was like stepping into heaven.

I quickly learned the ropes and saw the bureaucracy of corporate life in America in the 1990s. It didn't take long for me to realize that I didn't just need to work on success magick to grow and move up the ladder; I also needed serious protection to keep the system off my back. I hung strategic images in my little cubicle. One such image was a blown-up copy of the Strength tarot card. It served as a daily reminder of my core worth and a layer of protection over that worth.

I also kept a string of jet beads in my file cabinet drawer. This was success and protection mingled into one. No one would question a string of beads in my drawer—it was a simple way to add magick to my space without drawing too much attention to it.

It didn't take long for people to start to see that I was a bit "different." Someone asked me if I read tarot cards, which I did. Shortly thereafter, I had a line of folks wanting readings at every lunch break. Rather than hide myself and try to "assimilate with the Borg," I embraced being the weirdo.

Getting a Job Ritual Spell

The following ritual is also a spell. It can be used to help you find the perfect job when you first step into the world of employment. It can also be used to help you level up in your career or find a better employment situation. This ritual can be done once or, if you are looking to make a big leap in your career, you may need to do it a few times for maximum impact.

In the supplies listed for this ritual, you will see a printed resume and cover letter. If there is a specific job you want, write the cover letter for that job. However, if you don't really know what kind of job you are after, write the cover letter for your ideal situation. Make sure you include ideal salary, working conditions, job title, hours, insurance, vacation time, and anything else imperative to your life.

Supplies: A glass-encased yellow candle, an awl or long screwdriver, a green permanent marker, a pinch of five finger grass, a pinch of peppermint, a pinch of alfalfa, your resume printed out, a cover letter for the job you want printed out, and a gold coin.

Set Up: Create a small altar where you can keep this ritual going for as many days as required. The altar only has to be large enough for a piece of paper folded in half—it doesn't need to be bigger than that. Have all of the supplies out and ready to use.

Ritual: Using the green permanent marker, write the following things on the glass of your glass-encased yellow candle. Do this in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to you. Write:

- Your name
- Your birth date
- The word *success*
- The name of the job you want

Using the awl or screwdriver, poke seven holes into the top of the wax; do this in a deosil pattern.

Put the pinch of each of the herbs on the top of the candle and into the holes you've made. Don't overfill the top of the candle or it won't burn properly—you only need a pinch.

Fold your resume and cover letter in half and write "So mote it be" on the paper. Set the paper down on the surface of your designated altar space. Set the candle on top of the paper and lean the coin against the candle.

State your goal out loud and then light the candle. Sit and focus on your goal as the candle burns. See the email inviting you to an interview. See yourself nailing the interview. See the job offer. See it all as if it has already happened and feel the emotions of success. Hold this focus for at least twenty minutes. Let the candle burn for as long as you can. Make sure you practice fire safety and never leave a candle unattended. After at least an hour has passed, snuff out the candle.

Repeat this process the next day and every day after until the candle has burned down completely. This is the kind of ritual you can do over and over again until you get the result you're aiming for. The finished glass can be recycled once done.

First Day at a New Job Ritual

For the ease of description, this ritual will be written with a typical nine-to-five desk job in mind, but it can be easily modified for any other type of job. Start preparing for your day much earlier than you might need to. If you normally need an hour to get ready, start an hour earlier than that.

Supplies: Black tourmaline, citrine, your favorite incense (or clove or cinnamon), your favorite tea/coffee/morning drink, and a small bowl of salt.

Set Up: Place the stones and incense in your bathroom on a counter space. Put the bowl of salt in your shower or bath.

Ritual: Wake up with extra time to prepare for your day. Allow yourself the luxury of waking slowly, giving yourself plenty of time to come into full alertness. Once you are fully awake, get up and start the shower or bath. Light the incense before getting into the shower. Wash yourself as you normally would, but make sure you take time to spiritually cleanse too. Use the salt as an exfoliant and cleanse your spirit body. Wash off anything that doesn't serve you. Wash off any nervousness or fear and let it flow down the drain.

When finished, step out of the shower and use the incense as a smoke cleanse. Run the smoke across and around your body. Place it back on the counter and finish getting ready as you normally do. With each step, visualize your success in the day. Feel more and more powerful as you brush your teeth, comb your hair, get dressed, put on shoes, and whatever else you do to get ready.

Take the black tourmaline and citrine and go make your favorite tea/coffee/morning drink. Place the stones right next to your coffee cup. While you wait for the water to boil or the coffee to brew, start to visualize your day ahead: stepping into the office for the first time, meeting lots of new people, finding your desk space, and being shown all of the new things.

When your drink is ready, pour it with intention for a good day ahead. Draw an invoking pentacle over the top of your cup while repeating the word *success* over and over. Pick up your stones and place them in your pocket or bra. Sit down and drink your drink. Savor it. Take your time and let the drink of success fill you up.

Complete any other tasks you typically do in the morning and then leave, surrounded by a feeling of success. Any time throughout the day if you are feeling overwhelmed or nervous, feel the stones you carry with you and let yourself fill up with the feeling of success again.

When and if you have your own workspace, keep the stones there as a reminder.

New Home

Moving to a new house is quite a big deal. Modern life can make moving feel like a bit of a hassle, but it is still a typical part of life. There has only been a short amount of time in history that humans have started living in smaller and smaller family groups. Once upon a time, humans were mainly nomadic, but a nomadic lifestyle isn't one of packing up and moving from house to house every few years. Nomadic life is more about following the flow of the natural world around you.

As humans became more "civilized," they continued to live in family domiciles with many generations all living together. Children would inherit family land or homes. This isn't really commonplace anymore; people don't always stay in the same town, let alone the same house. It's a big deal to pack up all of your worldly belongings, put them on a truck, drive to a completely different place, and then unpack all of the said belongings. It takes a lot of physical and emotional work.

Leaving your family or childhood home to strike out on your own is a major transition and rite of passage. This is another step from being a child to becoming an adult. Moving to a different city, town, or country are all major rites of passage. Buying your first home is another rite that equates to a big shift in your life. But every move of your living space can be seen as a rite of passage; each one will vary in degree to your life circumstances.

Moving into a new place puts you into relationships with new spirits. It's good manners and good spiritual hygiene to introduce yourself to those

spirits. Before moving a single piece of furniture into your new living situation, it is important to make introductions to the spirit of the place, make offerings, and cleanse the space of any previous energies left behind. Some folklore about moving house:

- Your first guest should bring bread and salt.
- Leave your old broom behind. Do not bring it with you to the new dwelling. You don't want to bring your old troubles or anything you've purposefully swept out before with you.
- If possible, walk the perimeter of your property and say hello to the spirits who live there already.

The following section contains two different cleansing rituals to use before moving into a new space. They are completely interchangeable, but we give you two so you can choose whichever works better for you. Feel free to repeat either ritual at any time you feel a breach in your protection or notice a heavy energy that needs clearing out.

Cleansing Ritual #1

This ritual should be performed before moving any of your belongings into the new space. There are several options with the supplies for this ritual. Choose what feels appropriate to you and the place where you live. If all the people moving into the new space can be present this is ideal, but not necessary.

Supplies: Cleansing herbs or resins to be burned (sage, rosemary, thyme, lavender, dragon's blood, or frankincense can all work), a firesafe container, incense charcoal, and a bowl of salt water.

Set Up: Place all the items at or near the front door, including a lighter for the herbs.

Ritual: Start at the center of your home. Ground and center yourself so you feel fully present and ready to step into ritual. When you are ready, move to your front door and pick up the bowl of salt water. Use your dominant hand and draw a pentacle in the water.

Using your dominant hand, sprinkle water at the front door and then begin moving in a deosil direction. Continue to sprinkle the water as you move through the space. Follow the walls, turning down every hallway and room, allowing the salt water to touch all the edges of the space. This is to cleanse and clear your space. When you return to the front door, set down the bowl of salt water and pick up the herbs.

Light the herbs in your firesafe container. Keep them burning as you complete another circuit of your new house. Before you begin, use the smoke to draw a pentacle at your front door. Once complete, move in a deosil direction, stopping at any energetic openings, and draw another pentacle with the smoke. Energetic openings are electrical outlets, windows, mirrors, fireplaces or stovepipes, closets, entryways to crawl spaces or attics, and any other spots where you feel an energetic shoring up may be needed.

This process of warding your space may take some time. When you return to the front door, the work is completed and you can begin moving in your belongings! Welcome home.

Cleansing Ritual #2

This cleansing should be done before you move any belongings into the new space. This is best done a full day before the move-in process begins.

Supplies: A bell, cleansing herbs or resins (sage, rosemary, black copal, dragon’s blood, or frankincense), a firesafe container, incense charcoal, and an offering dish for a small amount of milk and honey.

Set Up: Make sure all the windows and doors are closed tight. Have all your supplies as close to the center of the house as possible.

Ritual: Begin by grounding and centering yourself so you feel ready to step into ritual. When you are ready, light the herbs. Move throughout the house, letting it get smoky. Let each room get filled with as much smoke as you can.

When you feel ready, run through the house, opening all the windows and doors. Allow the smoke to pour out, taking any negative energy with it. Pick up the bell and run through the space ringing it. This will disperse any old energy and leave the house clear and fresh.

Finally, place your offering of milk and honey at the front door. Speak to the spirits of the place. Let them know you want to live in harmony with them. Any spirits who support your life, success, and prosperity are welcome.

Close up the windows and doors and return the next day to move in your things. The work is done. Welcome home!

Cleansing the house is only the first step. Once the space is cleared, it's considered spiritually safe to move in your personal items, and you also want to bless the space that you have moved into. Typically, this is done once you are moved in and unpacked. It's like the final stamp on the letter to claim the space as your own.

House Blessing Ritual #1

This ritual is best done in conjunction with a housewarming party. It is designed to work for people of all faiths, so you don't have to expose your witchiness if you are not out of the broom closet. When all your guests have arrived, explain that you are going to ask everyone to participate in a house blessing.

Supplies: A beautiful image you will hang on the wall as a piece of art, a white or light-colored mat to fit it, a picture frame to fit the mat (at least

eight-by-ten inches), and colorful pens.

Set Up: Place the pens and mat on a flat surface in your home. Save the frame and picture for after the party has ended.

Ritual: When you have your mat and pens set up and all your guests have arrived, ask for their attention. Ask guests to write a blessing for your house on the mat. If there are specific themes or blessings you want included, name them. Give plenty of time for your guests to write out their best wishes for you.

After the party is over and your guests have all gone home, take the mat and put it around the picture you have chosen and place it in the frame. Hang this blessing as close to your front door as possible.

House Blessing Ritual #2

This ritual is best done with your coven, housemates, or a small group of people who are into the idea of a witchy ritual. It can be performed at any time of day, and any of the previous cleansings can be incorporated into the working. This ritual is best done once all the furniture has been moved in and all the boxes have been unpacked.

Supplies: Cleansing herbs to burn, a firesafe bowl, a bowl of salt water, a seven-inch candle, a wand, and an athame.

Set Up: If the house has an altar space, put all the items on the altar. If no altar is set up, use a kitchen table or coffee table. Place all the items out so they are easily accessible.

Ritual: Begin with a cleansing and grounding for the people participating in the ritual. Make sure everyone is ready to step into ritual space. One of the residents of the house should pick up the salt water.

Resident: “Together, we cleanse this space.”

The group walks through the house, sprinkling the space with the salt water to cleanse the perimeter of the house. While moving through the space, the group should chant:

We charge this home
We bless this space
We no longer roam
We have found our place

When the group has finished the perimeter, return to the altar space. The resident(s) should set down the bowl of salt water and pick up the herbs, lighting them.

Resident: “Together, we charge this space.”

The group walks through the house, using the smoke of the herbs to charge up the perimeter of the house. While moving through the space, repeat the previous chant. When the group has finished the perimeter, return to the altar space. The resident(s) should set down the herbs and pick up the candle.

Resident: “Together, we enliven this space.”

The group walks through the house, using the light of the candle to shine up the perimeter of the house. While moving through the space, repeat the previous chant. When the group has finished the perimeter, return to the altar space. Resident(s) should set down the candle.

Resident(s) call on any guides, allies, ancestors, or deities that they want to invoke and invite formally into the ritual space. Typically, you release these energies at the end of a ritual, but as this is for a new living space, you want to keep your allies welcomed, so saying goodbye isn’t necessary.

Each participant now speaks a blessing out loud for the new home.

Repeat any time it feels like the ward or protections of the house need to be reinforced.

Moving Sacred Space from the Old Temple to the New Temple

What happens if you move and you want to take the magick with you? If you have a ritual room, temple space, or other magickal space in your home and you have to relocate it, you can quite literally collect the magick you've created and take it with you to your new location, especially if you plan on building another temple or sacred space in the new spot. This ritual can be used to gather up the magick from one location and release it in another.

Supplies: A large quartz crystal, black fabric large enough to wrap around the crystal, a small box large enough to hold the crystal, and your wand.

Set Up: Perform this ritual immediately after you have finished packing up the physical objects in the room, including taking down any artwork from the walls. Open the black fabric in the center of the room and place the crystal in the center of it. Hold your wand in your hand.

Ritual: Starting in the north, use your wand to gather up all the energy in the room. Hold your wand in your dominant hand and make a stirring motion, gathering up the energy, and direct it into the crystal. Move in a widdershins direction, stirring up the energy and directing it into the crystal while you say:

I'm gathering up the power of this space
I'm gathering up the flow
May all the magick that's been created here
Get ready to be on the go

Repeat this process three times. Check in and see if there is any residual energy stuck in the room. If so, use your wand to gather it up, shifting it from the room, to the wand, to the crystal.

When you feel complete, carefully wrap the crystal in the black fabric and place it in the box. This box needs to be delicately moved to your new location—don't leave the box unattended at any point.

At the new location, when your new temple space is completely set up, place the box in the center of the room. Remove the fabric from the box and set it in the center of the room. Unfold the fabric.

Use your wand to then shift the energy from the crystal to the room. Visualize pulling the energy of your temple space out of the crystal like a pop-up tent. Move around your new temple space in a deosil direction. As you do, say:

I'm releasing the power of this space
I'm releasing the flow
May this place absorb this magick of mine
As of now, let it be so

Marriage

You might think including marriage in the leveling up section is an odd choice, but it does fit. Marriage, with its civic and legal ramifications, does change the nature of a relationship between people, and in that way, there is a leveling up of sorts. When people enter into a legal marriage, they are agreeing to a contract. Depending on the laws that govern marriage, the contract you're agreeing to confers upon you more rights and responsibilities that—as distasteful as it may seem on your wedding day—will protect you in court should the marriage not last "'til death do you part." A wedding ceremony is a ritual that creates a spiritual contract.

Now, that is not to say that other relationship models are not valid or that the only way to level up in a relationship is to get married, nor is it true that one person marrying another person and becoming a legally recognized entity is the best and preferred way to go about spending a lifetime. That's simply not true. A great number of people have long-

lasting, committed, loving unions that never require getting a signature from a county clerk or registrar.

For our purposes, we're going to use the *idea* of marriage, as in the joining of persons. And in that joining, something greater than the sum of the parts is created. And for the sake of ease in writing this, we're going to describe marriage as between two people. Again, that's not an endorsement of the way it "should" be.

Entering into marriage is a huge step. The ritual transforms you from being a solo person to an equal participant in a committed relationship. This ceremony may be large and lavish, or it may be a small ceremony at a courthouse. The ritual may take place because people want a ritualized commitment to each other, or it may take place for financial reasons or due to family pressure. It doesn't matter if you have a wedding or just sign documents at the justice of the peace, a marriage is a rite of passage.

Prior to the Middle Ages, in Scotland a handfasting was the probationary period, what modern Pagans and Witches might refer to as the year-and-a-day before the commitment was sealed. It was a trial period to determine if the couple wanted to hold this commitment for life. The couple's hands would literally be tied together during the ritual.[10] However, this wasn't the case in all the British Isles.

Many Witches and Pagans have likely heard the term handfasting. Some even refer to handfasting as a Pagan wedding ceremony. This term was common in Britain during the Middle Ages and referred to a betrothal, not the actual wedding ritual. It was a small ceremony that took place before the church wedding was held. It was legally binding, but the spiritual binding didn't happen until the church ritual made it official in the eyes of the Christian god. Handfasting was a common practice in England until 1754, when the Marriage Act was written into law as an attempt to stop any clandestine marriages from happening.[11]

So here you can see another British or Celtic term that has become ubiquitous with modern Pagan ideas. Many modern Pagans have latched

on to the idea that a handfasting is a trial marriage that renews after a year-and-a-day or every year on the anniversary. And handfastings are legally binding, assuming the person performing the handfasting is licensed to marry you. This varies from state to state in the US and rules vary from country to country, so make sure you know the laws where you live before hiring your high priestess to marry you.

Stepping into marriage is not a rite of passage to be taken lightly. You are bonding yourself to another person (or persons)—for better or for worse—legally, financially, and in the case of handfasting, spiritually. Even with the caveat that it is a "trial" year-and-a-day, it is deep magick. The taxman doesn't care if you think your marriage is temporary; if you filed a marriage license legally, you are married in the eyes of the law.

This is not an attempt to take all the romance out of marriage, but for many, the concept of a handfasting doesn't feel as permanent or serious. And it is. There is a reason marriage rates are going down every year: people are waiting longer and longer to get married. In many countries where there is universal health care, folks are choosing not to get married at all. People are opting for a handfasting ceremony and forgoing any legal entanglements.

Ultimately, a handfasting is a spiritual ritual. It is a combining of energies, spirits, and families. Even without legal papers, it bonds people together. A handfasting rite of passage is an initiation into that bonded state. Make sure you and any partners are clear on that commitment, what it means, and how you plan to respect that commitment before any formal ritualization happens.

We had a handfasting, but that came a year after our legal marriage happened. We didn't tell anyone we were planning to get married; we just went off and did it. Our marriage was a contract of legal obligation to each other and to the children we brought into the relationship. It was fun and silly and romantic, but we were both totally clear it was for insurance, taxes, and our kids' schooling. We so wanted to celebrate our commitment to each other for the long haul, but our spiritual ritual didn't happen until

later. It was far more serious for us to be ready for the spiritual ceremony over the civic contract.

The handfasting rituals we have included in this book are titled by how "non-Pagan friendly" they are. If you'd like to have a handfasting ritual but are worried that non-Pagan family might not be accepting, we have a ritual for you. And, conversely, if you want your handfasting to be witchy AF, we have a ritual for you too.

However, we start this section with a ritual for preparing for marriage. Perhaps you're not in a relationship at the moment, but you feel ready to step into a commitment. Perhaps you and your partner(s) are looking ahead at your future and starting to plan for your commitment. This ritual can help you step into the flow heading toward marriage.

Ready for Marriage Ritual

Perform this ritual on your own if you are not in a relationship or with your partner if you are in a relationship. This ritual is to set the energetic stage to get you ready for long-term commitment.

Supplies: A small jar of honey with a metal lid, a spoon, a handful of rose petals, a handful of damiana, and seven pink, four-inch chime candles.

Set Up: Have all the supplies out on a table or surface that is easily accessible. You will also need a place where the jar can be left for seven days following the working.

Ritual: Open the jar of honey and put in the rose petals and damiana. Stir the honey and then use the spoon to draw an invoking pentacle in the honey three times. As you draw the pentacles, say the following (if you are doing this ritual as a couple change the "I" to "we"):

I'm calling forth the sweetness
I'm calling forth the love
I'm calling forth commitment

I am ready, I am open, and I am willing

Place your finger in the honey and then taste it. Seal up the jar and light one of the pink candles. Use a lighter to soften the bottom of the candle and affix it to the top of the jar. Hold your intention as the candle burns. Repeat this process daily for the following week.

Once you have burned through the candles, start using the honey in your cooking as a sweetener, or use in baking, especially if this is food or drink that you will be sharing with your loved ones.

Handfasting Ritual for the Masses

This ritual can occur at any time. It is intended to work as a more traditional wedding ceremony with a strong Pagan flavoring. The terms Partner 1 and Partner 2 will refer to the couple getting married. If this handfasting is for more than two people, adjust the ritual as needed. The words for the officiant are clearly labeled. After the officiant asks questions of the audience or the couple, make sure to take time to wait for the responses.

Supplies: Ribbons to tie hands and any other decorations the couple wants included on the main altar space.

Set Up: Have a small table or altar space near where the ceremony will take place. Put all the ritual items on the table, set up in a way that is aesthetically pleasing.

Ritual: Allow the ceremony to start as desired by the couple getting handfasted. Once the couple are both standing in front of Officiant and any music has ended, let the ritual begin.

Officiant: “Today we are gathered to celebrate the union between (Partner 1) and (Partner 2) before friends and family. In order to hold this moment in each of your minds and hearts, I invite you to look around this sacred circle we are creating together. It is important we acknowledge that

(Partner 1) and (Partner 2) are not here on their own. A line of ancestors stands behind each of them, and I want to take a moment to honor that lineage.

"(Partner 1) and (Partner 2), please turn and face the guests you have invited to witness this moment in your lives. I invite you to look around at the people gathered here today. You are all special to (Partner 1) and (Partner 2). As members of their friends and family unit, your relationship to this relationship is not one of mere spectatorship. I ask each of you to contemplate these questions and answer them out loud to the couple: Are you willing to celebrate their love, from this day forward, as they celebrate it? Are you willing to lend them your fierce and unrelenting support as they support each other? Are you willing to laugh with them in good times? Are you willing to hold them in your hearts and prayers should there be rough times?

"(Partner 1) and (Partner 2), please face each other and hold hands. Marriage is one of the most wonderful and challenging of all human relationships. This ceremony doesn't make your marriage; only your relationship with each other can do that.

"Often rings are exchanged at the end of a wedding ceremony as a symbol of commitment. Today rings will be exchanged now so the couple may feel the bond of their relationship as they speak the words of their commitment to each other. May I have the rings please?"

Hold up the rings.

Officiant: "The circle is one of the most sacred symbols. It is a sign of un-
ending love and connection. It is a symbol of wholeness."

Hand the appropriate ring to Partner 1.

Officiant: "(Partner 1), place this ring on the finger of (Partner 2) and say, 'I give you this ring as a reminder of my commitment and love for you.'"

Hand appropriate ring to Partner 2.

Officiant: “(Partner 2), place this ring on the finger of (Partner 1) and say, ‘I give you this ring as a reminder of my commitment and love for you.’”

Pick up the ribbons and tie the partners’ hands together.

Officiant: “Love, patience, joy, and connection will form this bond.”

Wrap the ribbons around the hands of the couple another time.

Officiant: “Dedication, perseverance, forgiveness, and communication will form this bond.”

Wrap the ribbons around the hands of the couple another time.

Officiant: “Honesty, awareness, intimacy, and love will form this bond.”

Finish tying off the ribbons.

Officiant: “(Partner 1), please share the vows that you have written for (Partner 2).”

Wait as Partner 1 shares their vows.

Officiant: “(Partner 2), please share the vows that you have written for (Partner 1).”

Wait as Partner 2 shares their vows.

Officiant: “(Partner 1) and (Partner 2), will you both answer the following questions. Will you share each other’s burdens? Will you share each other’s laughter? Will you share each other’s dreams? Will you honor each other?

“By the power of your love and the commitment you have offered to each other, I pronounce you wedded. Please seal this commitment with a kiss.”

Handfasting Ritual for Witches, Pagans, and the Open-Minded

This ritual can occur at any time. It is designed for two officiants but can easily be modified for other numbers. The terms Officiant 1 and Officiant 2 refer to the two leading the ritual. This is also written for a couple, but if there are multiple partners being handfasted this can also be adjusted. The terms Partner 1 and Partner 2 will refer to the couple getting married.

There is also the assumption of attendants written into this ritual. You can have as many—or as few—attendants as you might like. They can either remain standing in the ritual space, as you would see in a traditional wedding, or they can enter as described and then sit with the rest of the witnesses and guests. At least one attendant for each partner should hold the ring, which will be given as a token to the other partner.

If the ritual is small (with only a few people), the circle preparations can be done around all of those in attendance. If it is a large gathering, the circle preparation can be done only around those getting handfasted. This handfasting is written without any specific deities being called. However, if the couple have deities that they want included in this event, this can be easily included in the ritual.

Supplies: A bell, a horn, a bowl of salt, a bowl of water, a bowl of soil, incense, a large white pillar candle at least six inches, herbs to burn for cleansing, a fireproof bowl, incense charcoal, ribbon for tying hands, decorated besom, and an athame for each Officiant.

Set Up: Have an altar set up where the couple will stand for ceremony. Place all of the items listed above on the altar in a way that is aesthetically pleasing. Add any additional elements the couple desires for decoration.

Ritual: The ceremony begins when Officiants stand in their place at the altar. No other people should be at the altar. Officiant 1 rings the bell, moving around the ritual space. At the same time, Officiant 2 sprinkles salt around the ritual space.

Officiant 1: “Welcome to the handfasting ritual for (Partner 1) and (Partner 2). We celebrate their union as community, friends, and family. We call to (Partner 1) to declare their intention.”

Officiant blows the horn. Partner 1’s attendants enter the ritual space, with Partner 1 as the last person to come into the area.

Officiant 1: “Are you (Partner 1)?”

Partner 1: “Yes.”

Officiant 1: “And do you enter into this ritual of your own free will?”

Partner 1: “Yes.”

Officiant 1: “And what is your intention?”

Partner 1: “To enter into a handfasting commitment with (Partner 2).”

Partner 1 takes their place at the altar.

Officiant 2: “We call to (Partner 2) to declare their intention.”

Officiant blows the horn. Partner 2’s attendants enter the ritual space, with Partner 2 as the last person to come into the area.

Officiant 2: “Are you (Partner 2)?”

Partner 2: “Yes.”

Officiant 2: “And do you enter into this ritual of your own free will?”

Partner 2: “Yes.”

Officiant 2: “And what is your intention?”

Partner 2: “To enter into a handfasting commitment with (Partner 1).”

Partner 2 takes their place at the altar.

Officiant 1: “We offer a cleansing to the couple as a way of preparing their bodies and spirits to enter into this ritual together.”

Officiant 1 holds the fireproof container while Officiant 2 places the herbs in the bowl and lights it on fire. Together they use the herbs to sain, or ritually cleanse with smoke, the couple.

Officiant 2: “As you are bathed in the smoke of this incense, release any fear, regret, or worry; allow yourself to be here and fully present.”

Officiants return the object to the altar and each pick up an athame.

Officiant 1: “Together we create a sacred circle to hold the magick of this ritual.”

Officiant 2 to the gathered audience members: “Please stand and lend your energy to the creation of our container.”

Officiants move to the north.

Officiant 1 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the earth that holds our bodies.”

Officiant 2 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the grove that holds our magick.”

Each Officiant uses their athames to direct energy from north to east. Facing the east, Officiant 1 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the air that brings us breath.”

Officiant 2 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the music that brings us joy.”

Each Officiant uses their athames to direct energy from east to south. Facing the south, Officiant 1 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the fire of our passions.”

Officiant 2 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the heat that warms our hearts.”

Each Officiant uses their athames to direct energy from south to west. Facing the west, Officiant 1 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the waters of our living blood.”

Officiant 2 draws an invoking pentacle and says, “By the rain that cleanses our spirits.”

Each Officiant uses their athames to direct energy from west to north, completing the circle and then returning to the altar.

Officiant 1 points their athame to the sky, drawing an invoking pentacle above, and says, “By the star in the heavens above.”

Officiant 2 point their athame to the ground, drawing an invoking pentacle below, and says, “By the star in the center of the earth.”

Officiants return their athames to the altar and face the assembled people with the couple in front of them.

Officiant 2: “You may all be seated. The symbol of the circle is a representation of a cycle that never ends and goes on forever. Night becomes day. The spring turns to summer. The spinning of the wheel never stops. Please bring forward the symbols you have chosen to represent this mystery.”

Attendants for each Partner give rings to Partner 1 and Partner 2. They will exchange these rings with each other.

Officiant 1 to Partner 1: “Place this ring on the finger of your beloved and state your oath.”

Partner 1 speaks their own words.

Officiant 2 to Partner 2: “Place this ring on the finger of your beloved and state your oath.”

Partner 2 speak their own words.

Officiant 1: “In the tradition of handfasting, honoring the old ways, I ask for you to clasp hands.”

Officiants tie the two partners’ hands together with the ribbon from the altar. Officiant 1 takes the bowl of soil while Officiant 2 guides the couple to face the north. Officiant 1 places the bowl of soil under the tied hands.

Officiant 1: “We call upon the spirit of earth. We ask you to bless this couple with strength and stability. Blessed be.”

Officiant 1 places the bowl of soil back on the altar. Officiant 2 picks up the burning incense while Officiant 1 guides the couple to face the east. Officiant 2 allows the incense smoke to flow over the tied hands of the couple.

Officiant 2: “We call upon the spirit of air. We ask you to bless this couple with clarity and communication. Blessed be.”

Officiant 2 returns the incense to the altar. Officiant 1 picks up the burning candle while Officiant 2 guides the couple to face the south. Officiant 1 carefully holds the candle under the hands of the partners, being cautious not to burn them.

Officiant 1: “We call upon the spirit of fire. We ask you to bless this couple with passion and inspiration. Blessed be.”

Officiant 1 returns the candle to the altar. Officiant 2 picks up the bowl of water while Officiant 1 guides the couple to face the west. Officiant 2 holds the couple’s hands over the bowl of water.

Officiant 2: “We call upon the spirit of water. We ask you to bless this couple with connection and flow. Blessed be.”

Officiant 2 returns the bowl of water to the altar while Officiant 1 guides the couple back to the main altar.

Officiant 1: “(Partner 1), repeat after me. By blood and blossom. By breath and bone. By star and seed. By ember and song. I pledge myself to you.”

Partner 1 repeats.

Officiant 2: “(Partner 2), repeat after me. By blood and blossom. By breath and bone. By star and seed. By ember and song. I pledge myself to you.”

Partner 2 repeats.

Officiant 1: “This commitment, witnessed by those present, by the ancient ones, and the spirit of this place, has been completed.

Officiant 2: “We celebrate this union and ask (Partner 1) and (Partner 2) to please seal this ceremony with a kiss.”

Wait for cheers and clapping to subside.

Officiant 1 moves the decorated broom in front of the couple, asking them to face the attendees.

Officiant 2: “Before this couple jumps the broom and starts their new life together, we ask each of you to help seal this bond with a tone.”

Officiant 2 begins a tone, this will grow and continue for as long as it needs to. When the sound ends, the two Officiants will gesture to the couple to jump the broom.

Officiant 1: “We thank the guides and guardians for witnessing this rite.”

Both Officiants pick up their athames and banish the circle in reverse order of how they created it. They do this in silence, gathering up the energy of the circle into their athames.

When they have finished gathering up the power of the circle, they both place their athames on the bound hands of the couple.

Officiant 2: “The power of this circle binds you to each other. Merry we meet, merry we all shall part, and merry we shall meet again. Blessed be!”

The bound couple should receive their guests while tied together. When this process is complete, one of the Officiants will remove the ties and give them to the couple as a handfasting present.

Retirement

There's an age range of folks who might be looking at the word retirement with a wistful glance before skipping this section completely. Retirement was once the great promise that a life of hard work would lead to a nice chunk of time when people could relax and enjoy the spoils of all the hard work they did. Retirement was a guarantee at one point, but that simply isn't true anymore.

Truly, the rite of passage of retirement is a huge feat to accomplish, and it is one worth celebrating.

Retirement Ritual

The following ritual could also be called a retirement party, and you might already feel familiar with it. This is to celebrate this rite of passage and honor the giant accomplishment retirement is.

Supplies: Party supplies including food, drink, and decorations.

Set Up: Make the party as big or as small as you desire.

Ritual: Party! Nothing else formal is needed. Invite people to make speeches to honor those that have worked with the retiree. Make space for the retiree to give a speech. Sing, dance, eat, drink, and enjoy the celebration.

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10. Brough, *Tradition of Handfasting*.

11. Ibid.

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RITES OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

The single most significant relationship a human has in their lifetime is with themselves. From the moment consciousness begins until the moment it ends, you are in constant conversation with yourself. The voice in your head, the "talking self," is an ever-present companion. You'd think you should have a pretty good idea of who you are since you spend so much time with yourself, but people spend much of their lifetime trying to figure out exactly that. Any time you gain some knowledge or wisdom, that is worth celebrating. And yet, oddly enough, there are very few rituals and rites of passage dedicated to selfhood.

What These Rites Have in Common

To choose one's own name is a radical, magickal act. Stating to the world that "I am unapologetically this" and then standing resolutely in your own shoes is nothing less than an act of revolution.

Each rite in this section, as distinct as they are, are all bound up in the rite of authenticity. One defining factor at work here is the right to self-identify as who you truly are. Stepping out from the warm and safe

clutches of your parents or guardians, moving away from the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and entering a place of self-determination and adulthood is the very act of becoming your own person.

The Catalyst. This is clear, although not always simple: you wish to be yourself, defined on your own terms, with your interior landscape reflected proudly on the outside for all to see.

The Ordeal. This is all about being true to your own nature. It means setting your own clear boundaries and, in some cases, you have to accept yourself for who you are. You may have to break the limitation that you, or others, have set on yourself. The hard part, of course, is finding out just who your authentic self really is. Wrapped up in the ordeal may be the work of trying on different personas, reinventing yourself, changing the way you dress or eat or address yourself. It's a thousand moments of saying "No" to find one moment of "Aha! Yes, that is me."

Alone and Yet in Community. This speaks to something most people won't admit: there is something wonderful about being you, and yet, it is hard work to be you. There are so many forces out there in the big, bad world trying to convince you that you are not what you say you are. The struggle is real.

Part of the "alone and yet in community" of these rites can be hard. You may take all the steps for yourself to own a label, you may ritualize taking on this title, or you may come out to your friends and family and feel wholeness in your decision. However, there may be people that don't accept your title. Even after making a proclamation of your change, there may be people who don't go along with your new identity. There may be people who refuse to use your new name, title, or identity. Part of the work of this section is to find the peace in yourself without the requirement of outside acceptance.

The Advisor. Becoming the advisor means being yourself every day and letting that be an example for someone else, even if they never acknowledge it to you. Being an advisor here means telling the truth about your journey back to yourself.

And there are so many more rites of personal identity. Because these rites are all about you getting to accept and own more of you, only you can really determine what rites are the most important. Perhaps you want to ritualize the title of grandparent, or Pagan, or weirdo, or priestess, or published author, or a myriad of other things. The following ritual can be adapted to any identity that you want to take on.

Rite of Authenticity

Adapt this ritual for any tag of personal identity that you want to take on. It can be done alone or with a coven or larger community. If possible, have a celebration afterward with people who do love and support you.

Supplies: A piece of clothing or jewelry to signify the identity you are taking on.

Set Up: Create an altar a way you find pleasing. Place your piece of clothing or jewelry in the center of the space.

Ritual: Take a cleansing bath or shower and get ready as if you were preparing to attend a big ritual. Wear your ritual finery.

Ground yourself and create sacred space in your favorite way. Call upon any guides or allies who have been an important part of this rite of passage for you.

Take time to honor the person you were before this change. Speak out loud who you were before this change. If you feel so called, you may want to write in your journal, dance, or draw as a way to honor the person you were before.

When you feel ready, shift into who you are now and the personal identity you are taking on. Speak to that title and identity and as you speak those words out loud, direct them into your clothing or jewelry. Imbue this item with the power of your new identity.

When you feel ready, put this item on. Feel yourself stepping fully into this new identity. Let it sink into your skin. Again, you may feel called to

sing, write in your journal, dance, or draw to express who you are now.

This will come to a natural close. Thank any guides or allies who supported your working and release them from the ritual. Open the sacred space in your favorite way.

The rite is done. Blessed be!

Coming of Age

Although modern society doesn't really have rites of passage for coming of age, there are a few that remain. The Jewish faith has the bat and bar mitzvah for young people to cross that threshold. Some folks may have a quinceañera or a sweet sixteen party to honor a shift from child to something else, but there is really little else offered to children in modern culture.

If you look to Native and indigenous cultures across the globe, you will find communities who still honor and celebrate the coming of age rites as a marker that a member of the community is no longer a child. These rituals all look different, but they often include a challenge that the child must face on their own, a trial of isolation. There are some rituals with trials of pain where a person is marked, scarred, or circumcised. Some rituals include an endurance challenge where they must prove they are physically ready to step into adulthood.

The timing of a child's coming of age ritual varies greatly depending on the community and the culture. In certain cases, there are physical markers that determine it is time for a child to take the ordeal, often connected to puberty. In others, it is a chronological age where all of the children will be put to the test when they reach a specific number. And then there are the communities that determine on a case-by-case basis when a child is ready to face the ordeal and be challenged.

An important note here. We must recognize that folks outside of any particular culture often judge other groups' rites of passage; there's a tendency to either fetishize the rite of passage or to be reviled by it. This is

a real holdover from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when dominant cultures began "discovering" and studying indigenous peoples and cataloging their remaining societies and traditions. Think about it for a moment: the notion of separating a child from their parents and relatives and having them fend for themselves for twenty-four hours out in nature to become a member of the "tribe" would have been considered barbaric, primitive, and abusive. These same folks making this judgment would likely have a nanny raise their children, consider simple touch to be spoiling a child, and then, at the ripe old age of four, send their children off to boarding school until they were sixteen and ready to go into business or get married. You see, it's all a matter of perspective.

Without a doubt, we are not saying any modern rites of passage you create should cause real, emotional, or physical danger to add authenticity to the rite. That would be reckless and irresponsible.

The loss of the rite is a problem in modern culture. There is no delineation on when someone changes from this to that. There is no clear line in the sand. This feels like it is more detrimental for young men in society than young women. Often, there is a clear physical line in the sand for a young woman that is not the same for men.

With coming of age rites of passage, you also must honor the child as they want to be honored. If your child is trans, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming, having a first blood ritual could be traumatizing. You want to make sure that any coming of age rite you create for your child meets their needs as they feel in their body.

However, whether you have a clear shift (like menstruation) or not, honoring the shift is important to the health of the individual. It shows that leaving behind childhood and stepping into adulthood is important, recognized, and seen by their families, friends, and communities.

First Blood: Phoenix's Tale of Bleeding

It's always bothered me that even when my blood first started in the 1990s, it was something to be embarrassed about. I've never stood for

menstruation being a taboo. I talk about my period a lot. Just ask my friends, they will confirm that it's something I share openly and unabashedly. I share my process and experience with everyone, whether they want to hear it or not. It is a regular topic of conversation in my life because it's a regular part of my life. I've never felt like I needed to hide it or be embarrassed about it. I'm proud of my blood.

When I was eleven, I wanted my period to start so badly. In my belief system at the time, having a period made me a woman and I desperately wanted to be a woman. One of the first spells I ever did was a ritual to try and make my period start. This was well before I was practicing Witchcraft, but looking back on it now, I recognize the spell for what it was.

I would immerse in the bathtub and fill a cup with water. Then I would lift my belly out of the break in the waterline and pour the cup of water down my stomach and between my legs. I did it as a symbol of the blood flowing out of me. It was sympathetic magick. It took some time for my period to actually start; rituals don't always work well on shifting biology, especially when you're eleven and have no idea you're doing a spell to begin with.

However, even with all my prayers, rituals, and longing, when it finally did come, I didn't realize what was happening. Even though I had been literally praying for it for over a year, the brown sludge in my underwear didn't look anything like blood. I thought I was ill and I hid any evidence of it from my mom for a couple of days. When the brown finally turned to red, I yelled for my mom from the toilet seat.

She was joyous. She was proud. She left home, leaving me with a white washcloth between my legs, to buy me menstrual pads and came home with a card and roses. She called all my aunts and my grandmother and then more roses showed up at the house and more cards. I didn't have a formal ritual. I wasn't led into the red tent with all the women of my family welcoming me into the fold, but the transition was honored by my elders

and I felt seen. Sure, it was also a little bit embarrassing, but it was also what I had wanted for so long.

Because of how I honor the menstrual cycle, I couldn't wait to be able to have first blood rituals for my daughters and to be able to ritualize and honor the transition. When my eldest started her bleeding, she was excited for her ritual. We took a full day to celebrate her. The ritual was beautiful and everything I would have wanted for myself. (A modified version of this ritual is included in the coming pages.)

However, when my younger daughter started bleeding, she wanted nothing to do with a ritual. She didn't want to bleed. She didn't want anything to do with it, and menstruation was not something she wanted to celebrate.

It would have been wrong to force her into a ritual to celebrate her first blood when it was something she was so against. But it felt important to mark the moment and honor her transition; it didn't feel right to ignore it or pretend it wasn't happening. For her, we greatly modified the ritual. We removed all of the drama and ritualistic elements and just created a special occasion for her. And it was still probably too much.

Celebrating first blood may not be everyone's cup of tea. Not all children will want that ritual to happen. Performing a first blood ritual is best done if the child is in agreement and wants to participate. The ritual can be as simple or elaborate as meets the child's personality and needs.

With my younger daughter—who was so against any ritual—I bought her a necklace and we went to the river. I kept the whole process short and sweet. I shared with her some of my joy and hardship with my cycle. I told her that I was excited and sad to see her growing up. I gifted her the necklace. By the end, she was totally over it and ready to go. So we did. We left the river and went out to a nice lunch. We didn't talk about bleeding again unless she started the conversation. It was simple and special and perfect for her.

First Blood Ritual

This ritual takes all day and requires several people to help make it happen. It should be performed—at the longest—three months after her first period. Ideally, women who menstruate or have menstruated will set up the ritual space. While the ritual is being set up, a father figure or non-menstruating close relation will spend time with the young person. They should be taken out for a meal or a walk in a beautiful place.

The father figure should share their favorite stories about the young person when they were small. As the time comes to meet up for the ritual, the father figure should say goodbye to the young person, acknowledging that they are saying goodbye to the child and will excitedly await the return of the adult. Potentially, they could offer a gift and then leave her to walk on her own to the ritual location.

Supplies: Colored markers or paint, flowers, food, drinks, gifts for the young person, red fabric, statues of goddesses, large fabrics, towels, a large bowl of warm salted water, and a white dress for the young person.

Set Up: Create an altar with flowers, statues, images, body markers, or anything else red and beautiful to decorate the space. Create a seating area for the girl, almost like a throne, with the bowl of salted water and towels close by. Have a place for gifts and food. Set aside the dress in a place nearby for when the girl arrives.

Ritual: When the girl first enters the ritual space, all of the women encircle her using the large fabrics to create a screen around her. Everyone should welcome her with their words, letting the welcomes overlap and become almost like a chant or song. When the girl is surrounded by the fabric, give her the white dress to change into.

When the girl is dressed, the fabric screen can be taken down and the main mother figure or eldest woman of the ritual should welcome her formally to the ritual as a member of the group of women. Each woman in

the ritual should embrace the young person or offer some personal greeting. The girl is taken to the throne and made comfortable.

The women take turns sharing the stories of their first blood while the young girl has her feet washed by one of the other participants. Ideally, this would be the main mother figure, but anyone can hold this role. As the blessings continue, the women can draw or write blessings on the white dress. The women in the ritual should bring the girl food and drinks. They can make space for the girl to ask them any questions that she might have about being a woman.

The young person can then open their gifts. Ideally, each ritual participant will have an opportunity to explain why they brought the gift and what the intention of the gift is. An excellent gift is a piece of jewelry that the girl can wear during her moon time as a memento of the sacredness of bleeding. The ritual will come to a natural closing.

Becoming a Man

Becoming a man and the rites associated with it are quite possibly the most perilous undertaking in this book. It's a little like trying to shoot a cloud with an arrow, from a moving train, when you don't know what a cloud is.

Part of the challenge is properly defining just what becoming a man actually means. If you wrote a list of everything you've been taught about what it is to be a man and then actually examined if those things are true for men, you might be surprised to discover that there isn't really much on the list after all.

For example, you might write "tall." Women are tall. Giraffes are tall. Tall doesn't not equal being a man. You might write "strong." Winds are strong. Ants are ridiculously strong. Any person of any gender can be strong. Strong does not equal being a man. What about writing "great with the ladies"? There are so many things wrong with this concept. Let's just say that being great with the ladies doesn't equal being a man.

You get the idea. What is often ascribed to manliness has nothing to do with being a man. In fact, these outdated stereotypes do a great deal in damaging a man's self-image and healthy growth.

Ask men to define the moment they became a man and you'll get myriad answers. For some men it's when they turned eighteen, and for others it's when they became a father. Others will say it was when they married or lost their own father. What's generally true for most men is that becoming a man is an unending, unfolding process. It's the *becoming* part that's far more important.

Irish folksinger and actor Glen Hansard often shares the epic tale of an arduous rite of passage. During one of his concerts, we heard him recount the story of rowing in a handmade currach for nearly 400 miles. As Hansard tells it, he and three other men rowed from Ireland to Spain, reenacting a centuries old tradition. What's important is that the musician states that a person must be older, a little wiser, and ready to submit to the sea to undergo this rite. For Hansard, his rite of passage included learning to trust other men with his life and—quite literally—going with the flow.

Oddly enough, one of the most common answers men give to the question "What would you have included in a rite of passage ritual?" is being taught how to shave with a wet razor, brush, and foam. In the grand scheme of things, shaving is a pretty benign task. In the context of a rite of passage, though, it transforms from mere grooming into something totally magickal.

A Good Shave with Gwion

When I was fifteen, I received an electric razor as a birthday present. I barely had enough fluff on my face to put it to any good use, but it meant a lot to me. A few months later I was visiting with my grandfather and we got into a debate about the merits of a wet shave versus an electric razor shave. His position was that there was nothing quite like a "real shave, with a real razor." I talked about how old-fashioned that seemed, and how

slow. Then he marched me into the bathroom, filled the sink with hot water, took out his brush, shaving soap, and razor, and taught me to shave.

My grandfather lovingly showed me how to prepare my face. He walked me through the steps of lathering up, actually shaving, and how to take care of my face after I'd shaved. It took fifteen minutes from start to finish. I've never used an electric razor since.

Over the years, I've shared my experience with a few other men. My son learned how to shave with a wet razor. A few men who didn't have a father growing up or who transitioned into a second puberty a little later in life have asked me to teach them to shave. It's intimate. It's vulnerable. There's a little risk involved. Honestly, it's quite beautiful and yet so simple.

In the microcosm, it's just about shaving. In a larger, more holistic worldview, shaving is about self-care and self-image. Shaving, however often or not you do it, is about doing a task over and over again, and in the process, learning about your own face and what feels good. It's a moment to connect with the person in the mirror and remember you are that person.

So how do we construct a ritual for an event that is completely different for each person going through it, occurs at different times in their lives, doesn't include or need a clear biological marker to point the way, and doesn't reinforce negative and damaging male stereotypes? Rather than looking for one instance, one moment, and saying "This is where being a man begins," we chose to enact ritual and honor the journey of becoming a man.

I Am a Man Ritual

The key to this ritual is storytelling and advice giving. All those gathered for this ritual are encouraged to bring a story about becoming a man. The

attendees could all be men, or they could be a mix of all genders. Much of that has to do with how the exact ritual is structured.

Supplies: Each participant brings an item that represents the idea of "man" and places it on an altar. The items could be things like pictures of men, equipment associated with being a man, clothing, poems, or pieces of jewelry.

Set Up: Participants will need to be seated in a circle. This can be done in chairs or on the floor. Items that participants bring are placed in the center of the circle to form an altar. An actual table can be used to make the altar, the items can be placed on a blanket, or they can just be gathered together.

Ritual: Cleanse, ground, and prepare to enter ritual space in ways that feel most important for the moment.

Whether standing or seated, form a circle. Create the circle starting with the youngest person, moving to the left with the next youngest person, and so on, until the youngest person and the oldest person are next to each other.

The youngest person starts and says, "Here's what I imagine it is to be a man." Then they speak for as long as feels right, sharing with everyone else gathered what it is that is important for them to say. Each person from youngest to oldest follows in the same fashion, sharing what they imagine it is to be a man.

Next, start with the oldest person this time. They say, "This is what I wish I knew about being a man." They then speak for as long as feels right, sharing with everyone else gathered what they wish they knew. Each person from oldest to youngest shares their thoughts.

Starting again with the youngest person: "Here's what I think is challenging and hard about being a man." Move around the circle, with each person recounting the challenges of being a man.

Moving back to the oldest person again: “The most joyful things about being a man are …”

And lastly, speaking in any order (but allowing each person to speak just once): “This is what I wish for each man here.”

When everyone has spoken their piece, let silence prevail. Remain silent for at least five minutes (it might feel like five hours). During the silence, look each person in the eye. Stay connected. Let the moments unfold. There is nothing to fix. Nothing that needs to be said. Nothing that needs to be hidden. If tears or laughter happen, let them happen.

Once the five minutes of silence have elapsed, find one person in the group that shared something surprising, profound, or terrifying for you. Sit with them. Ask follow-up questions or show appreciation; honor their story in some way. It could be a hug, a kiss, or just looking them square in the face and saying, “Thank you,” or, “I’ve been there too.”

Reform the circle as before. Starting with the oldest person, each person that identifies as a man takes one step into the circle and says, “I have heard the stories of what it is to be a man. Some of those stories were mine, are mine, and may yet be mine to tell. Some of those stories are not my story and yet I honor them. In this circle, with everyone gathered here, let it be known, I am a man.”

As each declaration is made, those gathered state, “You are a man.” When each person has made their declaration, been witnessed, and been acknowledged, take one last moment to look at every person in the circle.

Open up the ritual in any way that you prefer.

Coming of Age Ritual without a Gender Focus

A coming of age ritual does not have to be gender-specific. Not all kids want to step into manhood or womanhood. As modern culture becomes more open and aware of the nonbinary nature of gender, it only makes sense that there should also be ways to celebrate the coming of age without a focus on gender.

It will be important that the family and loved ones determine what the marker of this coming of age might be. Is it turning a specific age? Is it proving a certain level of responsibility? Is it the child stepping up and saying “Hey, I’m ready”? The marker of readiness is highly personal. This is also true for kids who are binary in their gender expression, but it can be an even more complex decision when you are working with a kid who is trans, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming.

This ritual can be performed whenever the child and loved ones agree it is time. Invite people to this ritual who are integral and supportive of the child’s growth. This ritual may take some time to set up; the more people who can help the easier it will be. Pick an auspicious time to do the ritual. This could be a new moon, full moon, trans day of awareness, or any special day.

Supplies: Flowers, food, drinks, gifts for the young person, fabrics to adorn the young person in, herbs to burn, incense charcoal, a firesafe container, and a crown, circlet, or other piece of ritual jewelry.

Set Up: Set up the room so the whole space looks lush, like a temple. Lay out fabrics and pillows and play soft music in the background. Create an altar with the flowers, herbs, charcoal, and firesafe container. Have the jewelry nearby, but hidden, so the child can’t see it. Have an area set up for the child to sit on.

Ritual: The child should be taken out for the day while the ritual is being set up. This could be with friends or family. No matter who spends the day with the child, they should do something fun and enjoyable. At some point, go for a walk or visit a place of nature.

The family member or friend should share stories they know about this person as they were going up. Tell stories about how the child has grown, succeeded, or overcome hardships. Tell them about witnessing their growth and how proud everyone is of them. Potentially, the family

member or friend could offer a gift that represents the transition into adulthood.

The friend or family member should bring the child to the ritual space. Before they open the door, the family member should express to the child they are about to cross the threshold. Once they step over the door, they will be leaving behind the child they were and stepping into the adult they will become. This is a moment for the child to also share their feelings of excitement or fear about this change in their life.

The family member instructs the child to knock three times on the door.

When the ritualists inside the room hear the knocks, one predetermined person will open the door and say to the child, “Welcome, (name). Are you ready to cross the threshold and step into your future?”

Once the child responds, the adult moves aside to let the child step into the doorway on their own. When they do, the participants should cheer, clap, and celebrate this step.

The child is brought to their seat and the herbs are burned. Use the herbs to cleanse the child. All the while, people should share their memories of when they went through this transition, when they knew it was time to step into a coming of age rite or to take on more responsibilities in their life. People should also share memories about their struggles and how they got through them.

When the cleansing is done, pull out the crown/circlet/jewelry. One of the participants shares that this jewelry is a sign of this ritual, a mark of their coming of age. The first participant should hold the jewelry and speak their blessings to the child. They then pass on the jewelry to another participant who also speaks blessings; this continues until all have offered blessings. The final participant places the jewelry on the child.

If folks have brought gifts, the young person can open them. When that comes to a natural close, end the ritual with food, drinks, and toasting to the young person embarking on their new adventure.

Coming Out

The process of coming out is highly personal. Coming out can also encompass a wide range of personal expressions. One might come out as queer, gay, transgender, or even Pagan. The coming out process is layered. You may come out to your friends and later your family, or vice versa. There may be a need to come out to your communities. You may also need to come out at work or on social media. All of these steps come with their own challenges.

Sometimes the first step, and potentially the hardest step, is to come out to yourself.

The following section was written by Misha Magdalene, who is a queer author of the book *Outside the Charmed Circle: Exploring Gender & Sexuality in Magical Practice*. We asked them to write the following piece because they have direct experience going through the coming out process on several levels. They have a Bachelor of Arts (magna cum laude) in gender, women, and sexuality studies from the University of Washington and are uniquely positioned to share not only professional but personal experiences of coming out.

It felt vital to have someone with not only training in this field, but also personal experience to write the specifics of this section. They wrote the coming out section, as well as the ritual following.

Coming Out Queer by Misha Magdalene

The standard framing of queer awakening is the narrative of "coming out of the closet" (or simply "coming out"), which is a common metaphor for publicly disclosing one's identity as a queer person: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, asexual, and so on. In this narrative, a person realizes they're queer in some way, then grapples with what that identity means for them, weighing the pros and cons of being "out" as queer, both personally and in relation to the other areas of their life: their family, their friends, their job, their community. Finally, they come out as queer, to one person or to many, and deal with the ramifications of being "out of the closet."

The unspoken context behind this narrative is that most queer people live in cultures where queerness is seen negatively, and that demand our silence and complicity under threat of ostracism, isolation, even death. Every queer person deals with this, implicitly or explicitly, every single day of our lives. We're constantly bombarded with messages that tell us we're bad, sick, evil, and wrong, and that we don't deserve to live. The people who promulgate these messages want us dead or, failing that, they want to silence us, so they can pretend we don't exist. Consequently, much of the coming out narrative is centered on the bravery of being out, of being your true self in full view of the public. Indeed, it takes a lot of courage to come out and be openly queer. Being out involves, among other things, a near-constant awareness of how one's identity interacts with the world around us, which can be terrifying and exhausting in a world where being out as queer can get you fired from your job, thrown out of your family, or murdered.

With that said, I struggle with the "coming out" narrative for a couple of reasons. When we focus on the "bravery of being queer," we risk sending the message that people who can't safely be out are cowards, or pressuring them to out themselves before they're ready. Still, being out does have real value, and real power. The act of living our lives as authentically as we can is emotionally healthy, and a deep moral good in itself. Moreover, it empowers us to hold space for others and give them hope that they, too, can embrace the same liberation we have. After all, the first person any of us come out to is ourselves. We might lie to ourselves or hide from ourselves, but we can never escape who we truly are—and if who we truly are is queer, the act of engaging with that truth can be scary as hell.

It can also be liberating and lifesaving. As dangerous as the world can be for queer people, the simple act of coming out, even if only to ourselves, is an act of affirmation and joy, of resistance and refusal. To acknowledge the authentic truth of our own sexual and gendered identities is to believe, just for a moment, in the validity and sanctity of those identities and,

beyond that, in the possibility of a world where our truest selves are valued and cherished.

Ritual for Coming Out by Misha Magdalene

The following ritual is offered to anyone who has realized they're under that queer umbrella but hasn't come out yet. This ritual is a solo working intended as a formal "coming out" to yourself, an owning of your own queer identity (or identities), though it can also be adapted as a group working for affirming one another's identities.

For this ritual, you'll need a place where you can be alone and undisturbed for at least half an hour. Ideally, this will be a place where you can speak aloud (or at least whisper) without fear of being overheard. If you want to set a formal working space for this ritual, you'll also need any tools or materials you use for that work.

Supplies: No specific supplies are needed, although a mirror is optional.

Set Up: Create your space with any set up that makes you feel empowered. Include an altar if you desire and place an object of empowerment on it. You may also choose to use a mirror and speak the words of the ritual to your reflection.

Ritual: Begin by standing or sitting in a relaxed upright position and taking a few slow, gentle breaths to center yourself in your own body. If you have a preferred method to ground, center, and/or align yourself, use that now.

When you feel you've achieved a state of calm preparation, set your ritual space formally, if you wish. Otherwise, simply stand with your feet about a shoulder's width apart and extend your arms out from your sides. Take a deep breath, hold it for a moment, and release it slowly. As you do, bring your awareness to your own body. If you find that you're holding tension or nervousness, breathe into those places and release what you're holding. If your balance is askew or your posture is hunched, gently adjust

your stance. Let your awareness expand to encompass the entirety of the space in which you're working, then say aloud or in your own mind, "I claim this space as mine." Bring your arms together and cross them over your chest, as though wrapping the space itself around you, then relax them at your sides.

Once you have a firm, relaxed stance, face the north and say, "By the earth of my body."

Turn to the east and say, "By the air of my breath."

Turn to the south and say, "By the fire of my blood."

Turn to the west and say, "And by the waters of my birth."

Turn to the north again, extend your arms outward, and say:

By all the powers I possess,
I call upon you, spirits of life and love,
gods of my heart and home,
queer ancestors of blood and breath,
to be with me in this sacred space
and to witness as I affirm:
I belong to myself.
I define myself.
I am myself.

Take a deep breath, then speak the words that define who you know yourself to be. These words can be a statement of sexual orientation …

I'm gay. I am a lesbian. I'm bisexual. I am asexual.

… or of gender identity …

I am a woman. I'm a man. I am nonbinary. I'm genderfluid.

… or of feelings or actions.

I love men. I love women. I love both women and men. I love people, no matter their gender.

If you wish to affirm multiple identities, you can combine these statements …

I am a trans woman who loves women. I am a nonbinary asexual person.

… or let each statement stand on its own.

I am a trans man. I am bisexual.

Envision introducing yourself to another person with your name and the identity you've claimed:

My name is _____, and I'm a _____.

Speak these words to yourself as many times as you wish. As you do, see yourself surrounded by all of your queer ancestors and heroes: all the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, demisexual, nonbinary, and queer people stretching back through history who have struggled, bled, fought, died, laughed, cried, sung, danced, painted, written, and lived lives of glorious wonder and beauty. They are here with you, always, reaching out to you, holding their arms open in welcome, laughing and cheering, blowing kisses and giving thumbs-up signs, all of them in their own ways, but all of them sending the same message: "You've got this. We love you, and we believe in you. You're one of us."

Stay in this space as long as you wish, listening to your own voice and, if they speak to you, the voices of those queer ancestors of blood and breath.

When you're ready to leave, if you've set the space formally, you may release it by whatever means you choose. If you've informally claimed the space as outlined above, you can release it by drawing in a deep breath,

gathering up the energy of the space created as you've performed this ritual, and consciously releasing it with your breath. Clap your hands together sharply three times.

The rite is ended.

A ritual is one step in the coming out process, but it is not the end of it. Coming out happens repeatedly. You may find that you are fully living your personal identity, at peace with who you are, when a person from your past shows up and you must come out to them all over again. This could feel affirming, it could feel like a challenge, or it could be a little bit of both.

Taking a New Name

In this section we are going to talk about Pagan- or Witchcraft-related name changes. However, everything in this section could just as easily apply to the many other reasons to change your name: gender confirmation, marriage, divorce, major life transition, safety, and more. All these reasons for changing a name are unique and different.

Name changes are pretty common in Pagan spaces. Sometimes it feels like folks take on new names as often as they change their underwear. But a name is a powerful thing. It is how you are seen and identified. A name tells a story about who you are and where you come from. For most people, they have no say in their name. It is assigned to them at birth—or shortly thereafter—by a parent or guardian. The name a person is given at birth says more about their parents than it does about the individual.

And yet, many people grow into their name. You begin to identify with your name. There are many theories about certain names bringing out certain personality traits. Does your name impact who you become? We would say yes! Have you ever met someone and totally could not see them

as the name they used? What about the opposite? Have you ever met someone that totally embodied their name? We can say yes to both.

This is why it is so important to honor a name change. It doesn't matter the reason a person has decided to take on a different name; the list of reasons is as vast as individual people. A name is a label you carry in front of you for the world to see. Humans should have some control over and contribution to the names that they are called.

The following ritual is to honor a full name change. This isn't the ritual to use if you are adding an additional name or changing your last name after a marriage or divorce. This ritual is for when you have been known to the world as one name and now you will be known to the world by another. This is a major life transition and this ritual reflects the depth of that change. Use this ritual when changing your name legally or magickally.

Keep in mind a name-changing ritual will not change your name legally. There are several steps (and expenses) associated with legally changing your name. If you do decide to go the legal route, make sure you do your research and complete all the tasks required to make it official.

Picking the Right Name: Personal Anecdote by Phoenix

When my daughter was born, I was stuck on two different names. People kept pressuring me to make a decision, but I was clear I could not decide until I actually met her. How could I possibly know her name when I had never seen her or connected to her energy in front of me? As soon as she was born (I'm not exaggerating, it was immediate), my family asked, "So, what is her name?" I looked at that little baby and knew which name was hers. But if I was still uncertain, I would have waited and seen what developed.

I've asked my daughter many times over the years what she would call herself if she could pick her own name. She has always answered with the name I gave her. I feel like I did some good work there. However, if she asked to be called something else, I would honor that request. Her name is a part of who she is. A name is a powerful tool. In modern society, we give

that power away to our parents; it is just accepted that that is how it works. It doesn't have to be that way.

My birth name is Danielle. It is a beautiful name and a family name, but it has never felt like my name. My mother loves the name and I've always felt like it's her name, not mine. I was called Dani for most of my life; that seemed to fit better. I made do with Dani. Of course, it's important to mention that at a young age, I changed the spelling of Dani; originally, my parents spelled it Danie. So, there you go. From the beginning I was always trying to make it fit. And it never has. (Sorry, Mom!)

However, after years of working on myself, after years of mediation, journey work, and soul-searching, I changed my name to Phoenix. Phoenix is who I am. I feel in alignment with that name. It is how I show up in the world. It fits me like an old pair of jeans. And it is actually a rather long story on how that name came to be my name, but that's for another time.

Over the years, I have taken on other names. And the gods know me by a name that no one else knows. Instead of replacing Phoenix with a different name every time I take on a new rite of passage, I just keep adding on. I don't need anyone else to call me something different; at least, not at this point. But it has felt important for me to call myself something different at different times. At the time of writing this, I have eight names (not counting my "legal" name). They all fit and make up who I am, but I'd never expect someone to call me by all of them.

When we take on a new name, it can be hard for other people to get used to. Pretty much everyone in my life calls me Phoenix now—except my parents. In fact, my mom flat out refuses. It's okay with me; I understand where she is coming from. But if someone new in my life calls me that old name, it bristles me. That's not who I am. Names have power. Honoring how people identify honors their sovereignty.

Finding your name may be a long process. It could take months or even years of spiritual work, discernment, and list-making to come to a firm decision. You may make a decision only to change your mind after trying the name on for a while, you may perform one ritual and easily find the

name that makes your heart sing, or you may be in a ritual where someone else names you and it fits like a glove.

There are many ways to come to a magickal name. I highly recommend trying on a potential name before doing a ritual to officially claim the name. Start calling yourself by that name for a few weeks. Give that name when you order coffee or get on a waiting list at a restaurant. Introduce yourself as that name to a stranger and see how it feels rolling off your tongue.

Personal Naming Ritual

This ritual is written for the solitary practitioner, but it can easily be modified to include loved ones, a coven, or a larger group. It is important to include only people who will support the shift in your name in the ritual process. This ritual can also be performed solo and then performed again with more people involved. The ritual is between you and your spiritual allies; none of them need to be human or embodied.

Before beginning this ritual, be clear on what allies you want to call into sacred space with you. Are there certain gods, ancestors, Fae beings, animal allies, or green bloods who you want to honor or witness this rite? All the decisions made around this ritual should take some time. There is no need to rush choosing a name or stepping into a ritual to claim it.

This ritual can be performed at any time.

Supplies: Incense, a candle, a bowl of water, a bowl of soil, paper, a pen, a cauldron or firesafe container, matches, an athame, a journal (optional), and a drum or rattle.

Set Up: Place all the items on the altar in a way that pleases you. If there are any specific allies you are calling in, have representations of them on your altar as well. Ideally, you will be skyclad for this ritual. If that is not comfortable for you, wear loose-fitting clothes.

Ritual: Stand before your altar space and ground and center yourself. Breathe in deeply and bring yourself fully present into the ritual you are about to perform. Say, “I stand before this altar as (your ‘old’ name), ready to step into my next phase.”

Pick up your athame and face north. Draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the earth that is my bones.”

Direct your energy from the north to the east. When you reach the east, draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the air that is my breath.”

Direct your energy from the east to the south. When you reach the south, draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the fire that is my spirit.”

Direct your energy from the south to the west. When you reach the west, draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the water that is my blood.”

Direct your energy from the west back to the north, closing the circle. Raise your hand, pointing your athame to the sky above you while stepping into the center of your circle. Direct your energy to close the gap about you by drawing an invoking pentacle. Say, “By the gods above me.”

Drop your athame, pointing to the ground below you. Direct your energy to close the gap underneath your circle by drawing an invoking pentacle. Say, “By the ancestors below me. The circle is cast. I am between the worlds and what happens between the worlds is seen and felt in all the worlds.”

Pick up the bowl of soil, face north, and say, “I call upon the spirit of earth. I call upon the power of strength, stability, and solid ground. I call upon the winter, midnight, and the bones below me. Join me in witness to this rite. Earth is sacred.”

Set down the bowl of earth and pick up the incense, lighting it while facing east. Say, “I call upon the spirit of air. I call upon the power of communication, clarity, and joy. I call upon the spring, dawn, and the breath of the ancients. Join me in witness to this rite. Air is sacred.”

Set down the incense and pick up the candle, lighting it while facing south. Say, “I call upon the spirit of fire. I call upon the power of passion,

understanding, and love. I call upon the summer, midday, and the warmth of the hearth. Join me in witness to this rite. Fire is sacred."

Set down the candle and pick up the bowl of water, face west, and say, "I call upon the spirit of water. I call upon the power of grace, flow, and intuition. I call upon the autumn, dusk, and the blood in my body. Join me in witness to this rite. Water is sacred."

Set down the bowl of water and stand in the center of the circle. Raise your arms and call to your specific allies that need to witness this rite. Call them all individually and speak from your heart. Ask them to bear witness to your rite.

Take a moment to ground and center yourself again. Remember your given name and all that it connects you to. Think about what this name means to you and how you are ready to step into a different relationship. If you feel called, you may want to journal about your feelings at this point.

Say, "I call upon all of these guides and allies as I release the name (your 'old' name). This name is a symbol of who I was. I release this name and step into the next phase."

Write your old name down on a piece of paper. Set it into the firesafe container and burn it. Watch as the smoke rises, taking note of any shapes or messages that stand out in the smoke.

Ground and center yourself again. You now stand nameless in sacred space. Take a moment to connect with what this feels like. What is it to be the nameless one? Leave space for this. Notice what comes up for you. You may want to journal any thoughts or feelings as they arise.

When you feel ready, pick up the bowl of soil, face north, and sprinkle yourself with the soil. Say, "I stand before the spirit of earth today as (new name). I ask that you see me and honor this change. Blessed be."

Set down the bowl of soil and pick up the incense. Face east while running the smoke around your body. Say, "I stand before the spirit of air today as (new name). I ask that you see me and honor this change. Blessed be."

Set down the incense, pick up the candle, and face south. Run your hand carefully over the flame without hurting yourself. Say, “I stand before the spirit of fire today as (new name). I ask that you see me and honor this change. Blessed be.”

Set down the candle, pick up the bowl of water, and face west. Sprinkle yourself with the water. Say, “I stand before the spirit of water today as (new name). I ask that you see me and honor this change. Blessed be.”

Set down the bowl of water and introduce yourself to your allies using your new name. Speak from your heart and tell them your reason for this change and what it means for you going forward. Explain how you will honor this shift and why you have chosen this name.

Pick up the drum or rattle and begin to chant your name, followed by “I am (new name)” over and over again. Continue to chant this, letting the energy begin to rise. Drum or rattle faster as you feel called. Speed up, letting the power of your new name begin to take over your body. Feel it. Dance it. Sing it. When you feel ready, end the chant by shouting your new name and the words “I am.”

Take a moment to sit in the silence with your new name still bouncing off of the circle around you. When you feel ready, say, “I am (new name).”

Stay in this space as long as you feel called. Journal about anything that you want to remember or keep track of for later. When you feel ready, take some time to speak with the guides or allies that you called into this rite. Speak from your heart, offer your gratitude, and say goodbye.

Pick up the bowl of water and face west. Say, “I thank you, spirit of water. Thank you for the power of grace, flow, and intuition. From this circle I bid you hail and farewell. Water is sacred.”

Set down the bowl of water, pick up the candle, and face south. Say, “I thank you, spirit of fire. Thank you for the power of passion, understanding, and love. From this circle I bid you hail and farewell. Fire is sacred.”

Set down the candle, pick up the incense, and face east. Say, “I thank you, spirit of air. Thank you for the power of communication, clarity, and

joy. From this circle I bid you hail and farewell. Air is sacred."

Set down the incense, pick up the bowl of soil, and face north. Say, "I thank you, spirit of earth. Thank you for the power of strength, stability, and solid ground. From this circle I bid you hail and farewell. Earth is sacred."

Set down the bowl of soil and pick up your athame. Point it to the ground, draw a banishing pentacle, and say, "By the ancestors below me."

Point your athame to the sky and say, "By the gods above me."

Turn to the north and use your athame to cut open the circle you created. Turn from north to west. When facing west, draw a banishing pentacle and say, "By the water that is my blood."

Turn from west to south, cutting open the circle as you go. When facing the south, draw a banishing pentacle and say, "By the fire that is my spirit."

Turn from south to east, cutting the circle open as you turn. When facing the east, draw a banishing pentacle and say, "By the air that is my breath."

Finally, turn from east back to the north, cutting open the circle. When facing north, draw a banishing pentacle and say, "By the earth that is my bones. This circle is open but unbroken. The work is done. So mote it be."

Release any natural objects to the earth, including any water, soil, or ashes. Be cautious to not pour salt or salted water on any plants; salt water will damage plants and could kill them completely.

Ritual for Adding a Name

Do this ritual when you are adding a name, whether this is a second name, a third name, or a hundredth name. This ritual can be performed on your own or modified to include loved ones, coven members, or a larger community. Before performing this ritual, be clear on what allies you want to call into sacred space. Be prepared ahead of time with any specific offerings that you might want to give to them during the ritual.

This ritual can be performed at any time.

Supplies: Paper, a pen, a cauldron or firesafe container, matches, an athame, offerings (optional), and cakes and ale for after the ritual.

Set Up: Place all the items on the altar in a way that pleases you. Have any offerings you might give to your allies ready to use.

Ritual: Stand before your altar space and ground and center yourself. Pick up your athame and face north. Draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the earth that is my bones.”

Direct your energy from the north to the east. When you reach the east, draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the air that is my breath.”

Direct your energy from the east to the south. When you reach the south, draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the fire that is my spirit.

Direct your energy from the south to the west. When you reach the west, draw an invoking pentacle and say, “By the water that is my blood.”

Direct your energy from the west back to the north, closing the circle. Raise your hand, pointing your athame to the sky above you while stepping into the center of your circle. Direct your energy to close the gap about you by drawing an invoking pentacle. Say, “By the gods above me.”

Drop your athame, pointing to the ground below you. Direct your energy to close the gap underneath your circle by drawing an invoking pentacle. Say, “By the ancestors below me. The circle is cast. I am between the worlds and what happens between the worlds is seen and felt in all the worlds.”

Call upon any guides or allies that you predetermined you would invite into the ritual. Give any offerings that you have prepared. Speak aloud to your guides from your heart and ask them to witness your rite.

Write your new name on a piece of paper. Say it out loud and light it on fire in a safe container. Say, “I am now (new name).” When the paper has finished burning, anoint your forehead with the ashes and say, “I am now (new name).” Repeat this for as long as it takes for it to feel true.

Thank your guides and allies for attending the ritual. Speak out loud and from the heart.

Set down the bowl of soil and pick up your athame. Point it to the ground, draw a banishing pentacle, and say, “By the ancestors below me.”

Point your athame to the sky and say, “By the gods above me.”

Turn to the north and use your athame to cut open the circle you created. Turn from north to west. When facing west, draw a banishing pentacle and say, “By the water that is my blood.”

Turn from west to south, cutting open the circle as you go. When facing south, draw a banishing pentacle and say, “By the fire that is my spirit.”

Turn from south to east, cutting the circle open as you turn. When facing east, draw a banishing pentacle and say, “By the air that is my breath.”

Finally, turn from east back to the north, cutting open the circle. When facing north, draw a banishing pentacle and say, “By the earth that is my bones. This circle is open, but unbroken. The work is done. So mote it be.”

Celebrate the name change with the cakes and ale! The rite is done.

Golden Age

As you move through life, you gain knowledge, information, and, hopefully, a little wisdom. Conversely, as you move through life your body slows down, things change, and many things end. You may be called to step into leadership more, sharing the wisdom you have gained with others. While this is happening, you may find your cycle of fertility changing or ending, children becoming adults and moving on to live their own lives, and retirement looming not too far ahead.

How do you honor the golden age of your life and the transitions and changes that happen during these years?

For some, these changes can be bittersweet. It is an honor to be seen as an elder in the community or as an expert on a topic because of the amount of years spent in study. However, these shifts can also come with sadness

and feelings of loss. Lost time, regrets of things not done, and even fears of mortality are all wrapped up in this time of life.

Entering into your golden years is a rite of leveling up, but also a rite of personal identity, and in some ways a rite of loss. We have included it in this section, but to further expand on this topic, check out the elderhood section in chapter 7, the retirement section in chapter 4, and the menopause section in chapter 6.

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RITES OF LOSS

Although all rites of passage could be looked at as a way of "leveling up," there are some rites that come with the experience of loss. And loss sometimes feels like a step backward. Loss feels like a punch in the gut, or a failure. When you are experiencing loss, it can be hard to see the good that will inevitably come out of it. Loss often comes with sadness, anger, and many of the emotions society says are "bad."

However, rites of loss are often your most powerful teachers. They show you how strong you are and challenge you to keep going. When you are undergoing these rites, it might seem impossible, like the hard times will never end, but when you reach the other side, it's remarkable to look back at how strong you truly are. Rites of loss challenge you because it's hard to see what you will gain at the end of it. With a rite of leveling up, you know there will be a reward at the end of your hard work, but with a rite of loss it is hard to see the pain or struggle as any type of reward.

What These Rites Have in Common

All rites of passage contain a component of letting go of one's identity, allowing a new identity to arise. The rites in this section, however, are fundamentally different, and that's due to grief. While you might pine for a simpler time—a more innocent version of yourself—rites of becoming, of leveling up, usually come with a real and tangible reward. The rites in this section, as a general rule, do not. And the changes you might be experiencing are, for the most part, permanent and irreversible. There is a loss here, and more often than not, a profound, earth-shattering, world-changing loss.

What people experience during loss is the rite of mortality. To put it even more bluntly, these rites, as painful as they are, prepare humans for their own inevitable demise. There is no escaping this. When you lose a pet, you are reminded that you too will die. When you lose a job, you not only grieve the loss of income and security, but buried somewhere in your mind is the awareness that one day, everyone gets fired from the job they know as life. Divorce is the death of a relationship, and with that comes the understanding that while 50 percent of marriages may end in divorce, 100 percent of successful marriages end with death.

In her book *When Things Fall Apart*, Pema Chödrön observes that people experience death "in the form of disappointment, in the forms of things not working out. We experience it in the form of things always being in a process of change. When the day ends, when the second ends, when we breathe out, that's death in everyday life." [12]

The Catalyst. The catalyst in loss is life itself and the ending of all things. Sometimes, although you are saddened and confused and grieving, the loss of a pet can elicit a feeling of relief, especially if your beloved pet companion was ill or suffering or if their ongoing care became an untenable burden. The sudden and unexpected loss of a job may completely disrupt your life and security, but the death of that old job may bring another opportunity. Most often in rites of loss, people face the

demanding style of the catalyst. There is rarely time to prepare, the event happens, and then you prepare for it by being in it.

The Ordeal. Loss is terrible. There are no good losses. Who wouldn't want their beloved dog to live on, perpetually happy, healthy, and running wildly through fields on your afternoon walks? But the ordeal is to get through loss. It is often said of loss and grief that there is never a time when you are past grieving, but rather, you learn to live with loss and grief as part of life. It is then that you can look back with laughter and tears of joy.

Alone and Yet in Community. This shows up in an odd way. People function in their lives with their grief hidden just under the surface. There's an appreciable difference in a person's demeanor when their world has been rocked by loss. There's a depth, a distance, a pulling back from the world that is ever so slightly evident if you look at them just the right way. And that knowing never quite leaves. The loss happens to you, but your life continues.

The Advisor. This role, the position of one that has survived, is never more profoundly needed than in this arena. Sitting with someone enduring unfathomable loss and the anguish that accompanies it is an act of pure compassion. You know, because you've been there or are there, that no words can comfort, no hugs can replace the soft nuzzle of a much-loved pet, and all the hand-holding in the world cannot assuage the pain of realizing a loved one will never hold their hand again.

Dealing with Grief

We start this section by looking at grief. For any rites of loss, there may be feelings of grief that need processing. There is a theory that there are five stages of grief. This concept was popularized by the book *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and has become quite mainstream. With this idea becoming commonplace, there has been a misconception; some folks hold the belief that you work through the stages of grief one at a

time, like it's a checklist to be completed. Once you've finished the steps, you will then be able to "move on."

But in our experience, that's not how it works.

The process of grief ebbs and flows. You may move through some of the stages only to move backward or step back into the step you thought you were done with. It is not a linear process.

Here is an excerpt from the book *What Is Remembered Lives* on the grieving process and the stages of grief:

- Denial: Simply stated, this is the initial point. The "I can't believe it" phase. During the denial phase you may find yourself convinced that there has been a mistake or it's been some sort of terrible joke. Even when a death is expected, this denial can be a part of the grieving process. It is a state of shock when the reality of the loss is just too big to fully process.
- Anger: This emotion can be directed virtually anywhere and at anyone. Perhaps you are angry with your dead, with yourself, with the medical establishment, with the Godds. Anger can be a cap holding back other emotions. The best way to deal with anger is to fully experience it and allow it to come through in healthy ways.
- Bargaining/Guilt: At some point you will find yourself making deals with a higher power to bring your loved one back. This can also manifest as looking at all the "what ifs." Looking at all the choices and opportunities when you could have done something differently. When you may have had a chance of saving your loved one, even if there really was no chance of that.
- Depression: Eventually the emptiness of the loss will hit. Most of us are familiar with what depression looks or feels like. Nothing matters, nothing is interesting, and nothing brings any ounce of joy. Living loved ones may try to rush shifting out of this stage. Attempts may be made to help someone in depression "cheer up." Although these attempts may be

offered from a loving or helpful place, depression will take the time it takes. And if it does deepen into a clinical depression, medical and/or psychological help may be needed.

• Acceptance: This is far from being alright and moving forward like nothing happened; acceptance is more like an understanding, a comfort with the discomfort of it. Grief never goes away, but it does dull, soften, and ease. Even when acceptance comes, there will be times, even years later, when one of the other stages rears its ugly head.[13]

The spiritual work of processing grief takes time and it is never going to be a one-size-fits-all solution. Know that it is going to unfold in its own unique way.

Grief has no rhyme or reason. It doesn't make sense and can't be broken down into logical steps to just get over it. Grief can physically hurt. Grief can make you sick. Grief can make you starve yourself or try to fill the void with food. Grief can spiral you down into a depression or numb you into oblivion. It can hit you when you least expect it. And it can leave you tiptoeing around it in an attempt to avoid touching the raw nerve of it.

And yet, giving yourself time and space to be with (or in) your grief is an important part of the healing process. Studies show when you ritualize grief, when you express it in ways that may only make sense to you as an individual, it can help.

Grief Ritual

Find a time and place where you can be undisturbed. There is no specific time when it is best to do this ritual. Do it when you feel called, any time you feel called, even if that is every day for a week.

Once you start the ritual, you might want to quit or stop. If you notice this happening, don't call it quits right away. Just pause and notice why you want to stop. Is it fear of facing your emotions, or are you just not ready to open yourself up to your grief? People fear that if they open

themselves to grief, they will never be able to step back from it, but that isn't true. Grief will take the time it takes, but you will move through it.

Supplies: Pillows, blankets, a journal, a pen, a glass-encased candle, dragon's blood incense, a drum, a rattle, a glass of water, and a box of tissues.

Set Up: Create a comfortable place where you can sit or lie down for as long as you need to. Put all the pillows and blankets together with your journal and pen nearby. Have the drum and rattle, tissues, and glass of water in a reachable place.

Ritual: Let yourself get comfortable in the pillows and blankets. Throughout the duration of the ritual feel free to move about your space: stretch out, curl up, roll around in the blankets, wrap yourself up, whatever you might feel called to do. Let your movements be comforting. Light the candle, light the incense, and speak to your grief. Speak for your heart about being ready to communicate with it.

Pick up your journal and begin writing about your grief. Write to your grief as if you were writing it a letter. You might feel called to express your emotions as you write. Let yourself express anything as it comes up. If you want to scream, scream. If you want to cry, bawl your eyes out. Bang on the drum, shake the rattle, pound your fist into the pillows, do anything you feel called to do. You may find you cry yourself to sleep in this ritual or you sit and sob for twenty minutes. Anything you do in this ritual space serves to help you process your grief.

As you write this letter, you may need to take breaks. Give yourself moments to pause. Take deep breaths, drink a glass of water, center yourself, and then go back to writing.

When you feel complete with the process of writing, set your journal aside. Drink a glass of water if you haven't already. Let yourself ground

and center yourself. Slowly release the emotions that you have been processing, blow out the candle, and put out the incense.

Clean up the ritual space, but don't return to your writing. Give it some time before you even read what you have written. You might not ever want to read what you wrote. If that's the case, rip out the pages and burn them.

Personal Cut and Clear Ritual

This ritual is excellent for any time you need to cut ties with a relationship that has outlived its need to be in your life. If there is an old friendship, lover, work situation, or even a coven you need to break ties with, this ritual can begin releasing your bonds and start the process of moving on. This ritual should be performed during a new moon or any time it feels necessary. You will need to be undisturbed for the length of the ritual, which could be as quick as ten minutes or as long as an hour.

Supplies: Favorite cleansing herbs for burning, a firesafe container, an athame, a plate with a lemon cut in half, a cup of hyssop tea, and a full-length mirror.

Set Up: Place the full-length mirror in a location where you can easily see your full self. Put the firesafe container with the herbs in it near the bottom of the mirror along with a plate and your cut lemon. Have your athame close at hand. Place the cup of tea in your shower, but don't turn on the water.

Ritual: Stand in front of the mirror, breathing deeply, and bring yourself into center. When you feel ready, light the cleansing herbs. Keep them burning throughout the whole ritual process.

Look at yourself in the mirror and notice if there are any areas that look "off." Perhaps there is a spot that's blurry or off-color. Perhaps you notice an area with a slightly hazy look or your eyes keep getting drawn to a specific part of your body. These are places where you have blocks, obstacles, or ties that need to be released. If you don't see anything that

looks off, do an internal scan of your body and see if you feel anything. Is there a tight muscle or soreness? Have you noticed unusual pain cropping up somewhere in your body? There can also be places where there are ties that need to be released.

If you don't feel anything is off, follow along with the cleansing, but use the smoke over your whole body. If you feel called to focus on any one area of your body, trust your intuition and cleanse those areas longer.

Start by using the smoke to cleanse areas that look or feel off. Carefully, pick up the firesafe container and use the smoke as a cleanse or sain. If the spot feels and looks better after cleansing, move on to the next spot. However, if it still feels like something is off, pick up your athame. Use your ritual knife to cut any etheric threads. DO NOT CUT YOUR PHYSICAL BODY! Rather, cut any threads or ties that are hooked into your spirit body. Cut those ties and then use the smoke on the spot left open.

Do another scan of your body, both by looking in the mirror and by closing your eyes and doing an intentional spirit scan. If there are still areas that need cleansing, or if any places where you cut ties don't feel closed, take the halved lemon and rub that on your body. Do not do this if you have open wounds or are allergic to lemons.

When you feel clear and clean, take a shower, washing as you normally would wash. When you are done, pour the cup of hyssop tea over your head, making sure it is cool enough to touch before you do it. Let yourself air dry.

Broken Heart Cleansing

This is a solo ritual that can be done at any point when you are dealing with a broken heart. This is a ritual for processing grief. It may need to be repeated over and over again. Know that each time you perform this ritual, you are shifting your energy and things are improving. It may not feel easy, but the steps forward from grief are often small. You may not be able

to see how far you have come until you have walked a long way toward healing.

The following ritual calls for the use of black walnut, which can stain if not handled properly. Make sure you thoroughly rinse off any containers you use and avoid wearing any items of clothing you don't want to have stained.

Supplies: Several whole black walnuts, pantyhose, Epsom salt, and a bathtub of hot water.

Set Up: This ritual requires a bathtub. If you don't have a bathtub in your home, see if a friend or family member would let you use one. Place the black walnuts into a leg of the stocking, tie the stocking off, and cut it so you are holding a sack of walnuts. Fill the bathtub with hot water and add in a cup of Epsom salt and the sack of walnuts.

Ritual: Allow the tub to fill before getting in the water. The sack of walnuts will begin to leech a dark color into the water. Allow your body to sink into the tub as much as possible, but don't soak your head.

While you are in the tub, allow yourself the time and space to feel and express your feelings. If you want to cry, cry. Express and emote as you need to. Continue to do this until you feel complete—or at least, complete for the moment.

When you feel ready, take the stocking of walnuts out of the water but stay in the tub. Drain the bathtub, watching as the water goes down the drain. Let yourself feel the pull of the drain and let that pull help to shift anything else that needs to be let go of. Watch as the water disappears, taking some of your worries along with it.

Repeat this process anytime you are overcome with heartache.

Divorce, Handparting, or Ending a Relationship

It’s unclear where the term handparting originated. But when things come together, there will also be things that fall apart. As Wiccan and early Pagan rituals started to become more easily available, divorce rates also continued to rise. It just makes common sense that folks who wanted a Pagan wedding ceremony, or handfasting, would also want a Pagan divorce ritual—also referred to as a handparting, although there is no historical information related to the term handparting.

Many of the rituals and writings available about handpartings could lead you to believe that Witches and Pagans are much more levelheaded, calm, and understanding when it comes to divorce or relationships ending than someone from the mainstream. Most handparting rituals include both (or all) parties of the couple working together in ritual space.

In our experience, two people breaking up are likely to struggle being around each other, Pagan or not. The following rituals are written for a divorce, handparting, or breakup when one person needs to do the releasing work on their own and for when both (or all) parties can work together to complete the ritual. When two people can put aside their differences and disagreements to ritually end their relationship, more magick has been done in just that decision than what any formal ritual may offer. If you can do the ritual together, that’s an amazing blessing. If you can’t, that’s nothing to feel bad about.

The dissolution of a relationship always has a larger impact on more than just the people in the relationship. Friends and family may feel like they have to choose a side. Covens or communities may be impacted. Children may have split homes. Property may need to be divided. Money issues could flare up. There is a lot more to a handparting than a simple ritual.

The following rituals are for your personal spiritual processing. They should not take the place of legal counsel, mediations, or therapy to help you take the other steps needed to move on from a marriage ending.

Phoenix Gets Divorced

When my first marriage ended, it was a deeply painful time, but it was also a relief. I was ready for the relationship to be over. I was done. But it was hard to hurt the person that I cared for and who I knew cared for me so deeply.

In the grand scheme of things, my divorce was a rather easy dissolution; we remained amicable and were willing to work together. Emotionally, it was a very trying time, don't get me wrong. There were lots of tears and many times yelling and fighting, but we figured our way through it as smoothly as we could.

If we didn't have a child together, I'm not sure that it would have been as simple as we made it. We wanted to make it work because of her. We knew we would always be in each other's lives because of her, so we both gritted our teeth and worked it out.

I'm also a no-nonsense kind of person. Once I have decided something is happening, I just do it. I don't like things to feel unfinished or unsettled. Once we had the hard conversation and our relationship was over, I immediately started the steps of moving out, separating our belongings, and making plans for custody. I jumped right into the action, making little space for the emotions of it. It wasn't until much later—after our handparting ritual, actually—that the emotional impact took its toll.

Several months after the relationship ended and we had both moved into our own houses, we decided to do a handparting ritual. It was simple and easy. We didn't cast a circle or invite participants. We didn't announce it or make anything public. In fact, except for a handful of my closest friends, I haven't shared the details of this ritual until now. The ritual is included in the next section, the Couple Handparting Ritual.

After the ritual, I began to wonder if I had made a terrible mistake. I started to question what I truly wanted. All the things that had felt so clear and simple to me suddenly looked muddy and confusing. I had to process my grief of failing at marriage, because that was what it felt like. I had failed.

My grief came much later than I thought it would, but it did come. I sat with it, honored it, listened to it, and ultimately moved through it.

Individual Handparting Ritual

This ritual is written with the original handfasting tie as a part of the ritual. It is common in a handfasting for the participants to have their hands tied together as a symbol of their union. Ideally, you want to use this same tie for the handparting ritual. If there isn't a handfasting tie or if it isn't available, another tie will do.

However, if you are using a replacement tie, you will want to take time with it before starting the ritual. Imbue the tie with your feelings and memories of your partnership. Speak stories that were good and happy as well as those that were challenging and difficult. Write your name and your partner's name on the ribbon, along with the date of your handfasting or wedding.

Supplies: Handfasting tie or replacement ribbon, a sharp pair of scissors, an athame, and a bowl of salt water.

Set Up: Place all the items on a simple altar. You can use any surface or table.

Ritual: Ground and center yourself. Take your time and let this ritual move at a pace you feel ready for. When the time is right, pick up the handfasting tie. Hold it in your hands. Smell it, feel its texture, and let it bring forth memories.

When you feel ready, pick up the scissors and cut the handfasting tie. Set the scissors down and pick up your athame. Give yourself time to connect with your spirit body and see where you may have etheric ties that need to be severed. Use your athame to cut these ties.

If you can't feel or sense these energies, act as if you could. Move your athame over the exterior of your body until you feel like stopping. When you stop, make a cut in your aura. DO NOT CUT YOUR PHYSICAL

BODY! Visualize a tie to your relationship being cut and setting you free. Any ties should be reeled back into your body. Call these pieces back to yourself, then use the palm of your hand to flood this area with a bright healing white light. Continue to do this until you feel ready to stop.

Set down your athame and dip your fingers into the salt water. Sprinkle this over yourself, using it as a cleansing to clear your spirit body of anything else.

When you are finished, place the pieces of your handfasting tie away or burn them if they are safely able to be burned; trust your intuition to tell you what is best to do. You may also feel compelled to take a shower. Do this if you must.

Couple Handparting Ritual

The ritual written here is very simple. It is written for the members of the handparting to be present only. However, this can be adjusted if there is a desire for witnesses or a high priestess or high priest to officiate the ritual. A handparting is a very private ritual; witnesses are not a required part of the process.

There will be no formal words written for this ceremony. If either person feels called to speak or to make agreements for how they will conduct themselves moving forward in life, this can be added to the ritual. If there are children involved, you may want to consider this, but it is not necessary. It's important all parties agree not to argue and to stay civil during the ritual.

Supplies: Handfasting tie or stand-in tie, a bowl of salt water, scissors, cleansing herbs, incense charcoal, and a firesafe container.

Set Up: Place all the objects on a simple altar space. Each of you takes time to ground and center yourself.

Ritual: When ready, speak to the dissolution of your relationship. Place your rings in the bowl of salt water. Each of you pick up a side of the

handfasting tie. Together, pick up the scissors and use it to cut the tie in two. Each of you should keep one side of the tie.

Light the charcoal and place the cleansing herbs in the fireproof container. Each partner takes time to use the smoke as a cleansing. When complete, take a moment to honor each other and go your separate ways.

You each will need to determine what to do with your piece of the tie. If it's made of natural materials, you may decide to burn or bury your piece of the tie. You might also want to keep it as a memento of that time of your life or save it for any children from the relationship.

End of a Job

Losing a job can be a terrifying experience. It can be heartbreaking, scary, or a total relief. It doesn't matter if you get fired, are made redundant, or face life circumstances that force you to quit, losing your job is a difficult rite of passage to go through. The loss of a job can make it feel like the rug has been swept out from underneath you. A steady job is a sense of security and having that unexpectedly taken away can rock your world, and not in a good way.

Think about any time you've been around a new group of people. Almost immediately after the handshakes and the "Oh! It's nice to meet you too," comes the question "What do you do?" Folks like to know which box you fit in. If you answer, "I'm a schoolteacher," a person hears you've got a college degree and love children. You're steady and safe. If you answer, "I'm a doctor," people will make assumptions about your income and level of schooling. Likewise, when you say "I'm between jobs" or "I just got laid off last week," there's an immediate reaction that looks a lot like fidgeting and looking away and wishing there was a hole to jump into. Folks aren't quite sure what to make of that answer because it's not the answer they expect.

And let's be honest, it's awkward to be on either end of that conversation. For most people, losing a job is like losing a big piece of

their identity. For years you were the schoolteacher or the cook or the welder. It's difficult to be the unemployed person.

When we look at the steps in a rite of passage, losing a job is an ordeal but typifies the dissolution phase too. You are no longer that which you have been; the names and privileges of your former profession no longer apply to you—you still have an engineering degree, you did work as an engineer, but you're not an engineer anymore. That can be a hard pill to swallow.

There may also be a deep sense of loss, relief, or excitement when the loss of a job or career is due to life circumstances, like becoming a stay-at-home parent or needing to care for ailing family members.

Phoenix Gets Laid Off

I worked in the corporate world for many years. I was really good at my job and I worked for a pretty great company. We made organic body care products and I was the manager of our customer service department. I was paid well and had a lot of flexibility. The folks I worked with were accepting and kind. It was actually the best corporate job I have ever had.

Right after I started working for this small company, it was bought out by a large corporation located in a different state. Everyone insisted that it would change nothing. They loved us, they loved what we did, and we would be taking over all of their other body care brands. Sounded good! And for a year, that's exactly how it went.

Then one random day, a team of corporate suits arrived, and we had a surprise staff meeting with all of the employees. As we walked into the meeting room, I jokingly said to my coworkers, "Well, it's been nice working with you." I'm sure you can see where this is going.

We were all laid off. Some of us were let go that day. Some of us were given thirty days, sixty days, or ninety days. Because I was the one person who knew how to do all the work of my department for the smallest amount of money, I was kept for ninety days.

It was shocking, but not really. I was scared, but not really. I knew that after ninety days I would be in deep trouble. I was living paycheck to paycheck and I could not imagine having another corporate job. For the next ninety days, I spent more of my days doing less and less work as my counterpart in another state took over my duties and got up to speed with the company's systems. I'd work for a couple of hours and then spend the rest of the day waiting for an email with a question. Instead of sitting there staring into nothingness (or you know, looking for another job), I read several novels and updated my social media pages. On the last day of my employment, I was basically alone in the office. There was no one to say goodbye to. There was no party to send me on my way. There were no tearful coworkers telling me they would miss working together. It was quiet and weird. I shut off the lights and walked away.

I knew that something needed to happen. I had to have a job. I had to get another paycheck—and soon—but I'd really only been half-ass looking. I'd brushed up my resume, applied for a few jobs I didn't really want, and spent lots of time trying to figure out what the hell I was going to do next. Sadly, winning the lottery didn't manifest for me.

Throughout the process, I held sadness for all of my coworkers that were already gone. I held sadness for the building that was going to be empty in a few weeks. I held sadness for a small family business turning into a megacorporation. And, because I'm a Witch, I also cut my ties with that job, that specific time in my life, and prepared myself for the next adventure that was going to come my way.

It wasn't all smooth and happy. I processed all the grief for all the externals, but it took a long time for me to process all the internals. In fact, I was totally unconscious of my internal process, which is probably why it took so long. The next three years were really difficult. It's a long story (I'll tell you about it over a cocktail someday), but ultimately that shift—that uninvited shift—totally changed my trajectory. The life that I am living now is what I had secretly dreamed about but didn't really think

was possible. If I hadn't been forced out of the corporate nest like a baby bird, I never would have learned how to create anything on my own.

We don't know what the future holds. Losing a job can mean that life is never the same again and it can also mean that something wonderful is about to happen. As Witches, the best we can do is recognize the situation we're in; call on guides and allies; perform a ritual; acknowledge our grief, fear, sadness, loss of income, stability, and identity; and begin to move through the situation.

Last Day at the Job Goodbye Ritual

This ritual should be performed before you walk out of the building for the last time. You can do this if you are choosing to leave a job or if you have been terminated. It takes only a few minutes and can be done without anyone realizing you are doing it.

No supplies or set up are needed.

Ritual: Close your eyes for a moment and take a deep breath. Feel yourself in the place you are. Notice what it feels like to be in the workspace. Notice how your energy is in this place. Take it all in.

Pause and take a moment to say thank you to this space and to your time there. On an exhale, say goodbye.

Pause again and release any connections that you don't want to take with you. Leave them in your workspace. If you feel called to, shake your body off or flick your hands to let anything go that you don't need to be bringing along with you.

Loss of a Job Cleansing

When you are let go from a job, it's important to cleanse that job out of your life. This is especially true if your termination was harsh, unexpected, or difficult. This cleansing is best done with at least one other person. Ask your coven, learning circle, or close friend to help you. This cleansing should be done as soon as possible after leaving your workspace.

You might find you need to do this cleansing several times, especially if you don't find employment right away and find yourself dwelling on the job you lost.

Supplies: Cleansing herbs to burn, a firesafe container, a rattle or drum, and a bowl of salt water.

Set Up: Place all supplies on an easy to reach surface.

Ritual: Ask your friend to place the bowl of salt water on the floor. Shake off over the bowl of water. You may also want to place your hands in the water and use the water on your third eye, heart, and belly. Say all the harsh things you're feeling into the salt water. Shake it off, let it go, and give it to the water.

Set the bowl of water back on the surface and have your friend grab the rattle or drum. Let them shake the rattle or bang the drum all around your body, front and back. Have them pay close attention to any areas of your body where you feel tight, stuck, or pained. Focus may need to be paid to your heart and throat.

When you both feel this step is complete, set down the rattle or drum and pick up the herbs and firesafe container. Light the herbs and let your friend use the smoke in all the areas where you just used the drum or rattle. Take your time with this process, clearing out any last remnants that may be stuck.

When you both feel this step is complete, set down the burning herbs. Have your friend use their hands to fluff your aura or smooth out your spirit body. End this process with a hug and say words of affirmation to each other, such as, "You are all right. You are loved."

Have your friend take the salt water out of your house and pour it out. Make sure to not pour it on any plants, as salt water will kill plants.

Empty Nest

There comes a time when a family home isn't filled with as much family anymore. Children grow older and eventually move out, and when they do, a house can seem awfully empty and eerily quiet. While empty nest syndrome isn't a recognized medical or psychological disorder, the pattern of "symptoms" is consistent. Folks finding themselves at home without the constant interaction and connection to their children report they felt intensely depressed, lonely, and purposeless.[14] The feeling of "not having a parental job" anymore is often experienced more acutely by a primary caregiver.

Standing in stark contrast are those empty nesters that feel overjoyed, unburdened, and free for the first time in years. There's a growing body of research that suggests that far from being overwrought with grief, caregivers find renewed interest in romantic relationships, shared hobbies, and remembering why they fell in love with their partner(s) in the first place.[15] To be sure, these folks still miss their children's presence, but what they probably don't miss is the constant financial and scheduling constraints, the encroachments on personal privacy that have become routine, and prioritizing others' before their own.

Regardless of whether you're jumping for joy at the prospect of an empty home or beset with longing, there is a profound change in the timbre and tone of a home. There is one less person rummaging through drawers or taking a shower or playing guitar in their bedroom, and that has a visceral impact on the environment of the house. With the absence of children come the subsequent absences of particular foods in the fridge; favorite breakfast cereals are no longer purchased every week—in fact, they might not need to be purchased at all. There's decidedly less laundry detergent used. Your household collection of plates and cups seems all of a sudden to take up far too much space in the cupboard. It is precisely these changes that inform us to conduct a rite of passage ritual.

Becoming Demeter: A Personal Anecdote by Gwion

The room is mostly empty. A strand of Tibetan prayer flags dangles listlessly from a single thumbtack. The white walls are punctuated with tiny pinhole dots, the last reminders of where posters and photos once lived. A thrift store desk, repainted many years ago, sits empty. The lack of homework and hair scrunchies and coins hurriedly deposited there makes it seem even older and somehow smaller.

I've placed an offering bowl filled with cleansing herbs in the middle of the room. The bowl seems to float on a sea of beige carpet. The charcoal is lit. A single curling tendril of smoke rises from the center of the bowl and I close the door.

Sometime later I return with a laptop, a monitor, and a tangled mess of cords and plugs. I manage to place everything on the desk, although given the angles and precarious nature of the piles, it seems like it might all fall off at any moment. I sit on the floor, reaching for an extension cord, when my eyes begin to well up. There's a catch in my throat as I take in far too short of a breath and the tears start. And they continue. You know that kind of crying, right? Taking huge gulps of air, snot running down your face, mixing with the salty wetness pouring down your cheeks … the I'm-a-total-mess kind of crying? Yep. Like that.

A week ago, my daughter (we'll call her Kore) packed up her stuff and moved out. She'd been planning this for a while. Her boyfriend and a couple of coworkers she attends college with found a place not too far away that was in the right price range and zip code. I carried a few boxes to her car. Perfectly normal. Plenty of smiles. Well wishes. No drama. Exactly the way you'd want a child to leave home.

And then there was that empty room that had somehow become the office that I didn't want to go into.

You see, Kore had played there in that room. She'd struggled through challenging high school classes and navigated first breakups in that room. She laughed with friends on so many phone calls and hung dried flowers collected from dances and dates on the walls. To most people it's a simple

room in a simple house, but this room was the sunny field in which Kore gathered flowers with her maiden friends.

It would be easy to cast her boyfriend as "the one who receives many guests," an epithet for Hades, but that would be grossly unfair to him. The immortal that carried Kore away from this room might have been Hades, but if it was, he was disguised as Time or Growing Up. Kore is becoming Persephone. Strong and independent, a sovereign queen in her own right, learning to stand in her own power, absolutely everything a parent could hope for.

But if Hades is really the passage of time and Kore transforms into Persephone, then I too must recognize that there's a place in this myth for me. I am becoming Demeter. She is gone and I cry. I miss her smile and our walks in the neighborhood where we'd discuss and plot and plan. The daily check-ins about college classes and who is dating whom and what's on the horizon for her. It literally and physically feels like my daughter has disappeared. And like Demeter, I am bidden by others: "goddess: stop your loud cry of lamentation." [16] *And like Demeter and Persephone, we've struck a deal. We have a regularly planned evening together and we hike when our schedules allow and she calls and texts, but still I miss her. When she calls or stops by, it's like the spring is coming back and all's right with the world for a while and I can forget that she'll be headed back to her own queendom soon enough.*

There is no chapter in the book What to Expect When You're Expecting *that deals with this. Most of my friends are still coming to terms with sleepless nights and diaper changes and school meetings and playdates; they have no concept of the rite I'm going through. There's very little in our culture and our myths and our stories of goddesses and gods that tells me what it's like when the daily work of being a parent suddenly changes and isn't really needed anymore.*

So, I turn to one goddess, Demeter, for she is revealing to me the way to perform the sacred rites of separation. Kore is gone. Persephone is Queen.

And I am learning to become Demeter.

Emptying and Filling the Nest: A Ritual

This ritual is for parent(s)/caregiver(s) with a child moving out of the house. If possible, complete this ritual at the closest new moon to when the child moves out or before you redecorate the room. If there is more than one person performing this ritual, determine who will do what pieces ahead of time. This ritual is written for the solitary practitioner, but it can be adjusted as needed.

Supplies: A bowl of salt water, a sprig of rosemary for memory, and a bowl of rose petals for love.

Set Up: Place all the ritual items in the middle of the child's room if it is empty. If the room is not empty, place all the items on an appropriate surface.

Ritual: Take a moment to ground. Let yourself feel the connection you have to your living space. Breathe deeply and let yourself become fully present.

When you feel ready, pick up the bowl of salt water and rosemary and begin to walk through the house. Stop in each room and share a memory of the child that has moved out; as you do this, use the sprig of rosemary to sprinkle the salt water in each room.

Speak some of your memories aloud. Share funny anecdotes and sad tales. Speak of the good times and some of the challenging ones. Let your memories bubble up and speak them out when they do. You may notice feeling emotional, happy and sad. Let the emotions come as they do. When you return to the child's room, use the rosemary sprig to sprinkle yourself with the salt water too.

Say, "(Child's name) is welcome here. The memories of those times are welcome here. We honor the joy and the challenges shared with (child's name) in this space."

Now speak from the heart, offering blessings to the child that has moved out. Speak out loud wishes for their success, safety, fun, and joy. When complete, set down the rosemary and bowl of water. Pick up the roses and sprinkle the petals in the room, sending your blessing along with them. Leave them to dry after your ritual is complete. Once they are dry, collect them and save them as a gift of incense for the child.

Speak aloud all of the joy and opportunities for you as an individual that come with this person being out of the house. Will you celebrate more quiet time with your lover? Have fewer food expenses? Will there be a renewed sense of couplehood with your significant other? Share blessings for yourself of what it means to be a person when parenting is not your first job.

If this room is going to be repurposed, speak to what this room will be transformed into. Call out blessings of the energy that this room will hold now that its role has changed shape. For example, if the room is becoming a gym, speak blessings of health and strengthening your body. If the room is going to be an office, speak blessings of creativity, abundance, and success. If the room is not going to be repurposed, speak blessings to the room for it to always be a space where your child can return, a harbor from any storm and a safe place for them to land.

Menopause

For all folks who enter into menstruation, there will come a time when that ends. Menopause is confirmed when an entire year has passed without a full menstrual cycle. For most people that is part of the natural cycle, while for others menopause happens immediately due to a surgical procedure or other health issue.

For some, menopause will be a sweet release, the ending of a long and complicated relationship with their reproductive cycle. Others may find menopause a sad milestone, a leaving behind of their childbearing years. It

may feel like freedom and the ending of a long and difficult road. And for others still, facing this shift could bring up a bit of all of these reactions.

Menopause Ritual

The following ritual is for saying goodbye to your menstruation and to allow all of the feelings that you may be holding around that. This ritual would ideally be done when you have gone a full year without a period. Do this ritual during a new moon. It is written for a solitary practitioner. There is a trance with this ritual; record yourself reading it and play it back during the ritual. Make sure to take moments to pause and reflect during the ritual.

Supplies: A black stone, jasmine incense, a bowl of salt water, and an athame.

Set Up: Create a small altar or use an altar you already work with. Place all of the items on the altar space.

Ritual: Light the incense and sprinkle yourself and the entire ritual space with the salt water. When completed, pick up your athame and create a circle around you in a way that feels right in the moment. Set down the athame and pick up the stone. Sit or lie down and place the stone on your womb.

Trance: *Allow your body to relax. Breathe in and out, allowing the breath to come as it wants to. As you breathe, allow the edges of your body to soften and expand. Continue to breathe, in and out, slowly and easily. Do this for a few moments.*

Place your hands over your womb space with the stone you've selected between your hands and your body. Give yourself some time to connect to the moment you first started to bleed. How was that first moment? What stands out? What do you remember?

Allow your mind to drift and wander, connecting with different moments in your life that you think of in regards to your menstruation. What stands out? What do you remember?

Allow your mind to wander to your last menstrual cycle. How was this moment? What stands out? What do you remember?

Connect to the energy of your body right now. You have lived in a physical cycle for so many years, and now the cycle shifts from an external cycle to an internal cycle. The wisdom is held within you now. Connect to the wisdom that is part of your inherent system.

Allow the wisdom of your womb to connect with the wisdom of the stone, a symbol you can hold in your hands as an external representative of the wisdom you also carry within you. Breathe into this partnering between you and the stone, the stone and you.

When you feel ready, begin to call your edges back in. Again, connect into your breath, feeling your body and the edges of your skin. Slowly open your eyes and look around the room, aware of your new wisdom.

Put the stone in a place where you can connect with it anytime you need a reminder that you are connected to the cycles of life. For now, snuff out the candle and the incense and remember that you are wise.

The rite is done. Blessed be.

Loss of a Pet

The death of a loved one is a difficult thing to go through. When that loved one is a pet, it doesn't make things any easier. Animal companions are family members, and bonds with them run just as deep as the bonds held with human family. When a pet dies, people still go through the grief process.

The loss of a pet in modern society is an interesting thing. There are some people who will understand your grief. They will hold your sadness or let you take off work or treat your grieving as if a human family

member had passed. But that's not most reactions. For the most part, people expect the grief of a pet to just pass. There will be more of an expectation to hurry up and "get over it." The lack of empathy from others can be just as painful as the loss. Most companies don't offer their employees bereavement time when they lose a pet. We've known people who have shared the loss of their pet with others by saying they lost a family member and leaving it as vague as possible. And truly, that is what it is.

For centuries, cultures across the globe have had loving and devotional relationships with animals. Pharaohs mummified cats to keep them company when they went to the Underworld. In Siberia, people were buried with their dogs. In China, horses were given elaborate burials and arranged carefully in graveyards.[17] One could argue humans and animals have always been connected like family; humans are animals, after all.

There is the added burden of choosing to end the life of your pet. Depending on the circumstances, you may be able to end your beloved's pain or suffering. It's never an easy choice to euthanize a pet, and it's not a choice all people will make, but it is an option you have. If you are struggling with grief, look at the section on death and the grief process later in this chapter.

Phoenix's Loss of Bearclaw

My longest relationship with a male being was my black cat Bearclaw. I met him when he was about a year old and he lived to about seventeen. He was such a good boy, my Mr. Kitty. He was sweet and loving and just a little bit stupid. I swear he could fly. He was able to jump higher than any other cat I've seen, and he could hover. Like, he could hang in the air for several seconds, no joke. It was incredible.

Like all living things, over the years he slowly deteriorated. We changed his food and did as much as we could to keep him going. It was important that he was not only comfortable, but having a somewhat happy existence. The aging process continued and he started to get sick, and then he got

sicker. I knew when it was time to take him to the vet for his final visit. He told me. He told me by how he looked at me, how his energy was gone, how he seemed to be in constant discomfort. He wasn't the same boy I'd known for such a long time. There was no voice in my head or anything like that, but his message was clear. He was struggling and unhappy. I didn't want that for him.

On the way to the veterinarian's office, I sang him songs and spoke in a soft voice. I told him who would be waiting for him on the other side. I called upon the Egyptian goddess Bastet to help guide the way. I stayed with him as the vet gave him the medicine that would slow his heart, telling him all the while what a wonderful companion he was and how grateful I was for being a part of his life.

It was terribly painful afterward, but it was also a relief. An ailing pet takes a lot of work. He needed a lot more help than our other pets near the end of his life; he was incontinent and required special food and medicine that was a challenge to administer. The relief that came with his death also left me feeling a bit guilty. I didn't think I should feel relief over not having that responsibility anymore, and yet, I did.

It's been a few years now and I still miss him. I occasionally see him out in the world; I'll think I see him in the corner of my eye, but when I turn and look there is nothing there. I also see black cats with his same build. I always say, "Hi, Bearclaw!" I take these moments as messages that he is checking in on things.

Pet Crossing Over Ritual

After the loss of a pet, it can be difficult to immediately ritualize the process. You might be deep in your grief and unable to face the ceremony. This ritual doesn't need to happen on any specific timeline unless that is important to you. This could be done at the vet's office, with your beloved after they have passed, or months later. Do this ritual when it feels most important and possible for you. If you want to perform this ritual but you

can’t handle the process due to your grief, reach out to friends or loved ones to help you complete the ceremony.

This ritual should be done with anyone you feel called to include. It is best if other family members that may also have had a relationship with your pet are present.

Supplies: A candle and an image of your pet.

Set Up: Create an altar in any fashion that you choose. Put the image of your pet in the middle with the candle behind it.

Ritual: Take a moment to ground and center yourself before starting this process. If there are several people participating in the ritual together, breathe together three times, slowly and deeply.

If called to create sacred space, do so, but it isn’t necessary. Call upon any guides, guardians, or beloved dead that you may want to help your pet cross over. Ask your beloved dead to welcome their new member with open arms. Let them know your pet has crossed and their time has come, and ask them to help with the transition.

When you feel ready, light the candle. Speak out loud to your beloved pet. Tell them how much their relationship meant to you. Wish them well on their journey.

Take as much time as you need. Let the emotions come as they might. When you feel ready, say goodbye to your pet, then thank your beloved dead for witnessing your rite and helping your pet to cross over.

As a final step to close the ritual, blow out the candle. Leave the altar space set up until you feel ready to put it away. We keep our beloved pets’ ashes and pictures on our ancestor altar. If you feel called to do the same, transition your pet’s image from the altar to your ancestor altar.

Pet Burial Ritual

If your pet dies at home, or if you decide to bring their body home from the vet, you have the option of doing a gravesite ritual. There is a practical

matter that must be mentioned here: not all yards can work for pet burial. Not everyone has a yard. That doesn't make your situation any better or worse. We used the following ritual to place our beloved's ashes on our ancestor altar, which is a perfectly fine adjustment if need be; we didn't have the opportunity to bury our pets because of our yard being mostly clay.

You'll need to be aware of the depth of the hole you will need to dig. There are very real physical issues you have to consider, especially the more rural the environment you live in. Confirm the location of buried utility lines so you don't accidentally damage them. Make sure that you research the appropriate depth required for safely placing your dead. There may be restrictions where you live on burying pets in your yard. Check to make sure you aren't breaking any laws before performing this ritual.

Choose a song ahead of time that you want to sing during the burial process. There is a song offering in the next section dealing with human death.

Supplies: The body of your beloved pet, an appropriate space dug in the ground, enough muslin fabric to wrap your beloved, a bundle of your favorite dried herbs, and a bunch of flowers.

Set Up: Create the space in your yard that will hold your pet ahead of time. Once it's ready, determine if you will do the entire ritual outside or move it outside after you begin.

Ritual: Speak to your beloved dead. Offer your appreciation for them sharing a part of your life. Tell stories and remember them. As you do this, wrap their body in the muslin fabric.

Start singing and place your beloved pet into the earth. Place the dried herbs on top of their body and continue singing while filling in the hole. When you are done, place the flowers on top of the grave. Let the song

come to a natural conclusion. Say anything left in your heart to say and end the rite.

Death

There are only two rites of passage everyone experiences: being born and dying. Even though everyone goes through this rite, most people won't get to honor the transition. Most death rites are done for the living, the loved ones left behind, and not for the person who has died. Included in this section are rituals for those dying and for those in mourning.

The additional complication with death rites of passage in a Pagan context is that there are many diverse Pagan systems of belief. There isn't one unifying faith on what happens after death; the mystery is totally open for personal interpretation. In some Pagan traditions, there is a belief in reincarnation. Some look to the Summerlands, afterlife, or Valhalla, while others believe that their body simply returns to the earth and any awareness it had is gone. Death is the greatest mystery everyone faces; we won't know anything about it until our time comes.

As mentioned previously, there isn't one way that Pagans or Witches honor the dead or work with death as a magickal practice. However, it is rather universal that we honor our ancestors and lineages. We pay homage to those who have gone before. When we have a loss from death, we celebrate the life of the person at Samhain or Samhain-tide. We tell stories of them and salute with phrases like "Hail the goer" or "What is remembered lives."

Death Ritual for the One Who Is Getting Ready to Die

Have you ever heard of a living wake? Basically, a living wake is a party to honor a person who knows their time on this earth will be ending soon. Rather than waiting for death to celebrate the individual and say nice things about them, why not take the opportunity to share that with them while they are still alive? Typically, living wakes are done for a person

with terminal illness who has a clearer picture of when death is likely to come for them.

A living wake is not for everyone. Facing death isn't easy. Modern society doesn't really handle death well; it is upsetting for those who aren't even going through the process of dying. But, what better way to send someone to the Otherworlds than with the love and blessings of all those who know them best in life? It is a celebration of their life and they get to be a part of it.

In my opinion, the person being celebrated at a living wake should get to make the decision on how the event proceeds. This is not a good ritual to do as a surprise; the person being celebrated should be aware the event is happening. This is not the type of event to plan on someone else's behalf. The person being celebrated may not want to plan all the specifics of the event so they may delegate them to another person, but they need to be a part of the planning process.

A living wake can be a big party, a ritual, or both. The ritual included here is a bit of a combination of the two. The event can be set up for as small or large a crowd as desired. This ritual can be done in a big event center, a small home, or even in a hospice room. Adjust the size and scope of the ritual for the actual reality of the person who is preparing to cross over.

You will need a "stage" area where you will place an altar table and have room for participants to come up and share their stories. You will need a large comfy place for the celebrant to sit; this will be referred to as their throne.

This ritual should be performed while the celebrant is still well enough to enjoy the moment. For this ritual, you will need a person to act as host. This will be noted as Ritualist in the ritual notes.

Supplies: A small altar table, four candles, and the celebrant's favorite incense.

Set Up: Place the four candles on the altar table based on the directions of north, east, south, and west. Leave the incense burning in the center of the candles.

Ritual: When all the guests are seated, Ritualist goes to the front of the room at the altar table. Ritualist says, “Thank you all for gathering here to celebrate the life of (name). Each of us here has something in common, and that is the love we share for (name). Today we get to share our love with each other and with (name).”

Ritualist lights all the candles and incense. Ritualist holds the incense up and, if appropriate, uses the incense smoke to cleanse the space and the celebrant. Ritualist says, “We use this smoke today as an offering to (name). May this smoke cleanse and clear this space, these people, and (name) for the celebration of life that we are stepping into.”

Ritualist sets down the incense and gestures to the four lit candles. Ritualist says, “Today we call upon the four quarters, the mighty ones of the elements. We ask for the powers of earth, air, fire, and water to join this ritual. We ask that the guides and guardians of (name) join this ritual. We ask that the ancestors join this ritual.”

Space is made for the celebrant (or their chosen delegates) to make any specific callings to deities, ancestors, or other specific allies.

Ritualist says, “Now is the time when each of us that love (name) get to come up here and say why. We invite you to share a story or a memory. We invite you to share what is special about your relationship with (name). Consider this sharing a blessing to (name) as they prepare to go on their next great adventure.”

Space is made for participants to come up and speak. This may take some time. Ritualist will need to monitor the ebb and flow of this process and give people

time to come up and say their piece. This will come to a natural conclusion.

Finally, space is made for the celebrant to step forward and speak, if they choose to. This will need to be determined before the event.

When the speaking pieces come to a natural conclusion, Ritualist will return to the altar space, first inviting up anyone who did a calling at the beginning of the ritual to step forward and thank the spirits invited in. Ritualist will then extinguish the candles, thanking the directions and the guardians of the elements for being present in the rite.

Death Ritual for the One Who Has Died

This ritual is for magickal practitioners only. If you've lost a coven member or magickal ally, this ritual can be performed to honor their transition and help them cross over. Ideally, this ritual should be done within three days after the beloved's death. If you have access to any of their magickal tools (and you know they would agree to this), these should be used in the ritual. At the very least, their items should be placed on the altar.

Determine ahead of time who will lead which pieces of the ritual. It is best to split up the roles, but the ritual can be led by one or two people if that is what is preferred by the group. The roles of the ritual will all be written for Ritualist, but these can be split amongst several people if desired. If there is a traditional way for the group to create sacred space, follow that process. Otherwise sacred space can be created from the following ritual.

Supplies: The beloved's ritual tools, picture of the beloved dead, lots of food and drink for after the ritual, and two large candles.

Set Up: Create an altar with all the supplies listed, except for the food and drink. Have the food set up outside of the ritual space to be partaken in after the ritual is done.

Ritual: All participants come together and ground. This can be as formal or informal as the group requires. It is likely that emotions will be running

strong, so a longer formal grounding would be helpful.

Ritualist lights one of the candles, saying, “For (beloved dead’s name). We light this candle in honor of our last ritual with you. May this light help guide your way and serve as a symbol of the love we have in our hearts.”

Ritualist picks up the beloved dead’s athame. (If that isn’t possible, use the first two fingers of the dominant hand.) Draw up energy from the bones of the earth and direct that energy to the north, drawing an invoking pentacle. Then continue sending that energy around you as you circle to the east, draw an invoking pentacle. Continue this process to the south, the west, and the north again. Visualize your circle completing itself around you, filled with the power and protection of the ancestors.

Ritualist calls to the ancestors and the Mighty Dead. If there are specific ancestors or Mighty Dead your group always call, make sure to include them. Otherwise, call to those Witches who have crossed over that are ready and willing to aid your beloved dead find their way.

Ritualist calls to any deities that the beloved dead would want called. If you are uncertain or if there were no deities your beloved dead worked with, skip this piece. Speak from the heart, asking for this deity to help your beloved dead cross over and join the realm of the ancestors.

Ritualist lights the second candle and says, “For the ancestors and the gods to help (beloved dead’s name) find their way to the realms beyond.”

Each member of the circle now has an opportunity to speak to the beloved dead or to speak about them. This is a moment to share feelings, stories, and wisdom that came from the one that has passed. This may take a long time, or it may be very brief. Allow the space needed without attempting to rush it or slow it down.

If the group knows the desires of the beloved dead with respect to their tools, this should now be discussed. Where do the tools go? If anyone in the group has been bequeathed the tools, they should take them now. If this unknown, follow any of the legal rules around belongings for your state.

The group sings the song “Bone by Bone” by Sefora Janel Ray.

Bone by bone I honor you
Bone by bone I honor you (repeat)
I lay you down, for all that you've been through
I lay you down, and promise to remember you

Allow the song to move your body. Sing, letting the song build energy. Send this energy to your beloved dead and help them cross over to the ancestral realms. Let the song carry energy and raise a cone of power. Send energy to your beloved dead. Send it as a blessing, a boon, a love song, and a sending off.

When this comes to a natural conclusion, end by all stating, "What is remembered lives."

It is time to close the ritual and move to a more informal eating and "hanging out" time. There may be hesitation to stop. Closing the ritual may feel like a door closing and a final step in saying goodbye. This is exactly what is happening. If the group notices this hesitation, speak about it. Say what needs to be said, but move forward and close the circle.

Ritualist who called to the beloved dead's deities speaks out loud their gratitude and thanks for their support in the ritual.

Ritualist who called to the ancestors speaks out loud their gratitude and thanks for their support in the ritual.

Ritualist who cast the circle (or Ritualist who now possesses the beloved dead's athame) steps into the center of the space and breathes into the circle. Remember as you release the circle, you are also releasing your beloved dead. Face north and draw a banishing pentacle. Turn to the west, as if drawing back a curtain with the athame, and draw a banishing pentacle. Continue this process to the south and then the east, ending with the final banishing pentacle being performed in the north.

Ritualist: "The circle is open but unbroken, and merry we shall meet again."

Continue the gathering by eating the food and sharing more stories about your beloved dead. Let the gathering continue as long as it feels

appropriate. Ideally, you would not call on your beloved dead for another year unless it is Samhain, which is a highly appropriate time to honor their crossing.

[contents]

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12. Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*, 43.
13. LeFae, *What Is Remembered Lives*, 157–58.
14. Mayo Clinic Staff, “Empty Nest Syndrome.”
15. Clay, “Empty Nest Can Promote Freedom.”
16. Homer, “Homeric Hymn to Demeter,” line 81.
17. Leafloor, “Ritual and Burial.”

seven

SPIRITUALLY FOCUSED RITES

What would a Witch book about rites of passage be without talking about specific Witch-related rites of passage? There are rites that are specific to being a Witch or being Pagan. This section includes a small sampling of rites you might run into with a magickal focus. There are so many lineages and traditions out there; if you want to be involved with a specific tradition, you need to seek out practitioners of that tradition and follow their rules and guidelines for getting initiated or involved. However, the spiritual road is very personal. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging your personal journey and performing rites, rituals, and ceremonies that honor your steps along the path.

The rites in the section could also easily be placed in some of our other chapters. For example, the Coven Breakup Ritual also belongs in chapter 6 and the Becoming the Priestex Ritual also belongs in chapter 4. Your spiritual life is not an island; it is connected to everything else. But it feels important to keep these rituals in a section on their own.

What These Rites Have in Common

What these rites have in common is fairly easy to discern: they are all concerned with interweaving a magickal life with everyday life. Of course, there really is no difference between your magickal and your mundane life. Practicing magick doesn't need to happen at midnight, in a flaming pentacle, or in an old mansion in England; magick can and does happen on the subway or in the carpool lane or in the grocery store. It's all about perspective when you stop to think about it.

The rites of passage we're really talking about here is the rite of the Witch. You are committing to a life that includes magick and the practice of the magickal arts. Deciding you are going to live your life as a Witch is definitely a huge rite of passage and will inevitably change your view of the world.

From daily practice to starting a coven through initiation, one is marrying their lifeforce to the current of Witch energy that untold millions of people tap into each and every day. There is power and comfort and honesty and a certain understanding of how the world really works. Once glimpsed, there is no turning back.

The Catalyst. The catalyst is the inexorable pull to step into a larger, more vibrant, more connected, more alive world. If you've ever found yourself longing for something you can't quite name, a power that rests inside of you, then you've felt the call of a Witch. Through that call, your preparation might include an unquenchable curiosity. Read every book, interview authors, take classes, join open circles, attend public rituals, go to lectures, study other world religions, take a class on ancient mythology or anthropology, study herbalism, and talk with Witches, Pagans, Druids, heathens, occultists, Atheopagans, polytheists, Reconstructionists, and anyone else you can find who is connected to the mysteries of the Craft.

The Ordeal. The ordeal may take many forms. Most traditions—not all—have some form of initiation. Entry into the coven, working group, or circle can be an ordeal. Specific initiations have tests of trust, strength, wisdom, skill, memorization, fortitude, and endurance. It is our experience that as many folks fail their initiations as succeed.

Alone and Yet in Community. There is something wonderful about being in the community of Witches and like-minded folk. Almost every Witch we know takes time away from community to recharge and refocus. As Witches, we are ultimately responsible for our actions and the impact of our words and deeds. Time away from community is as important as time within it. Even as a solitary practitioner, there is the larger world community you are connected to.

The Advisor. Once you become a practicing Witch, you'll develop your own skills and specialties. At some point down the road, you may become an initiator, which is another ordeal all of its own. Trust us on that one!

Daily Practice

Daily practice isn't really a rite of passage. However, having a solid daily practice—acts that you commit to as regularly as possible—will change the way you view the world and your place in it. Daily practice can create a gradual, incremental shift of consciousness, which is magick, and transformative magick at that. For instance, if you decide to write a book and you commit to writing even just one hundred words per day, eventually you'll have a book. Likewise, if you want to become an effective magick worker, doing daily spells, learning magickal skills, and perfecting your practice in little steps will bring about a definite shift. You were ineffective and inattentive and now you are effective and attentive.

Daily practice is also important because it gives you the opportunity to check in with yourself. Occasionally, a rite of passage is so personal and private it might not register as something that could be honored or ritualized. You might trudge through events in your life because life goes on and you have to keep going even when things are challenging. A daily practice brings more awareness to daily life. It gives you a place to check in and a space to notice when things are moving or shifting in your world.

Daily practice is highly personal. You might hear folks share what they feel is the most important daily practice. Many teachers and leaders in

Witchcraft and Pagan traditions even require their students to maintain certain daily practices. Lots of types of daily practice are excellent and worth trying out, but the reality is that one type of daily practice isn't going to work for every person.

Meditation is what I hear most people speak of as their daily practice. And meditation is an excellent practice to have, but it isn't the end-all-be-all of practices. More than that, it doesn't work for everyone. There are so many different ways to meditate; it is not one-size-fits-all.

If you have found a daily practice that works for you, wonderful! Keep going with it. If you haven't found a daily practice that works for you, don't give up. Try a different way, attempt another thing, keep going. You will find a practice that fits into your life and it will help you when you do step into those big moments.

If you are searching for daily practices to spruce up your current practice here are some ways you might start:

- Meditation: Yes, meditation doesn't work for everyone, but there are lots of variations on a meditation practice. You could try a practice of breathwork, following your inhalation and exhalation. Listen to a guided meditation and be led along. Play music with binaural beats to help shift brain patterns. Put on music and dance around your bedroom. Meditation doesn't have to be sitting in silence. A good meditative practice is one that gets you to quiet your "thinking self" or your ego and leads you into a place of connection to something higher than your consciousness.
- Music: A practice of playing music or singing is good for the spirit. Sit down with a drum for twenty minutes, sing your favorite witchy chants for a while, or put on recorded music and let your mind follow the flow of music.
- Movement: Getting into your body is a practice that many modern people

avoid. This isn't about being "in shape" or going to the gym. This is

about moving your body without your brain telling you what is the right way. This could look like dancing around your space, going for a walk in your neighborhood, or even rocking back and forth or shaking.

• Divination: Pull a tarot card or rune. Check in with an oracle deck or ogham staves. Doing a quick reading for yourself at the beginning or ending of your day is an excellent way to tap into the flow of mystery. Divination provides you with information and shows you the pulse of what to expect in the days ahead.

• Journal: A writing practice is an excellent way to reveal what might be going on in your subconscious. Writing a couple of pages a day is a good way to get things out of your head (or subconscious) and into your awareness (or consciousness). Journaling doesn't have to be writing words; it could include drawing, doodling, painting, or gluing clipped images into a book.

• Check In: Having a friend you can connect with on a daily basis for encouragement, venting, and accountability can serve as a powerful daily practice. This isn't about having a friend to gossip with; rather, this is having a person who can hold you accountable when you don't accomplish a task you committed to or who can give you encouragement when you need a boost. A check-in serves as daily practice by helping you to be honest with yourself.

Daily practice is a way of committing to your spiritual process. Therefore, it should be tailored to fit your needs and work *with* you. If you try one thing and it doesn't fit, that's okay—try something else. Make sure you give it plenty of time. Often with daily practice you will reach a stage of boredom. There is a challenge in sticking to it and working through the boredom. See what is on the other side of that. It might just be a breakthrough.

Any daily practice should be worked for a three-month period before determining if it's right for you or not. It might not be comfortable at first,

but if you keep working with it and through it, you might just learn more about yourself than you thought possible.

Here are several ideas for acts of daily practice that can serve as tools for your rites of passage.

Waking Practice I

As you wake, stretch your body. Give thanks to yourself for what you can do with your body today (leave the judgments, aches, and pains for another ritual). Connect with your breath and know that whatever comes your way this day, you can always return to your breath.

Waking Practice II

Tell yourself, a partner, a child, a pet, a housemate, or the plants in your home what they mean to you. Saying "Good morning ____. I love spending Saturday mornings with you" can become a lovely daily practice all by itself.

Meal Practice

Preparing a meal is the most sacred time of the day. A simple ritual you can create whether you are preparing or eating the meal is to reflect on these questions: Where did this food come from? Who grew it? Who made it? How did I get it? How will this food sustain me or the people it feeds? What would my life be like without this food? How could I acquire this food with as little impact on the planet as possible?

Cleansing Practice

At the end of each day, give yourself the luxury of cleansing away the day. Whether in a shower, a bath, or by just sprinkling yourself with aromatic water, gently wash away the day and look back at the challenges, joys, people, and mysterious ones that participated in life with you.

Altar Practice

You might choose to create an ancestor altar, an elemental altar, a healing altar, or an altar for a specific piece of magick you are working. Take a few moments each day to sit with it. What messages does it have for you? Does it need tending in some way? Is there something calling to be added or something that is being called to be removed?

Pleasure Practice

Give yourself the gift of pleasure each day. This might be thirty minutes devoted to reading an engaging book, having a cup delicious of tea, having juicy sex (with or without someone else), or singing in the shower. Do something that speaks of pure pleasure for the sake of pleasing yourself. Note: Use good judgment here—seventeen shots of tequila may have unintended consequences and might not be in your best interest!

Initiation

Initiation is making a spiritual commitment. The style and flavor of that commitment may look different depending on the specifics of the magickal lineage or traditions you are initiating into.

A dedication is like an initiation, but it's often the step before. In a dedication you are committing to a process; you are saying you will dedicate yourself to complete a training, commit to a deity, or follow through in a specific program. An initiation is more like an official commitment to a lineage or tradition. It's no longer a moment of exploration, like with a dedication, but rather going all the way.

Initiation rituals vary vastly from one tradition to another, but there are often pieces of these rituals that have commonalities. Many initiation rituals have a dissolution of your previous self. These rituals often include an ordeal of some variety where you must suffer for your Craft or jump through the hoops to prove your dedication. And there is often an introduction of your spirit to the entities and/or deities of that lineage.

Most traditions, if not all, keep the details of their initiation rituals secret. There are a few reasons for that. A secret ritual holds power. If you could read the details of the ritual ahead of time, there would be very little mystery for you going through the process. A secret ritual also creates a boundary. Sadly, there have been people who have lied about initiation and then attempted to initiate others. With a secret ritual, there is a lineage created and the validity of one's initiation can always be tested. It creates accountability for those taking on power.

Here are just a few ways initiation can look:

- Self-Initiation: A self-initiation can be done when you are ready to commit to taking on the mantle of Witch or Pagan. A self-initiation doesn't give you access to any specific tradition or lineage, but it does give you a personal rite of passage as a commitment to your spiritual path.
- Traditional Initiation: In a traditional initiation, you are stepping into a specific lineage of Witchcraft or Paganism. The ritual will be completed in a certain way and any initiate into that tradition will have gone through the same ritual. A traditional initiation gives you access to the rites and rituals of that tradition.
- Traditional Elevation: Many traditions have levels of hierarchy. When you are in the entry level, you only get access to some information and practices, but as you increase your levels or degrees you gain more access. These are referred to as elevations.
- Commitment Initiation: In some traditions, initiation is not a requirement to participate in rituals. Rather, initiation is taken on as a personal challenge and as a desire to commit yourself to the tradition.
- Familial Initiation: There are families who have Witchcraft in their lineage. These families may have initiation rituals, or you may be considered an initiate because you were born into that family.

If you want to be a part of a specific tradition, it will be important to get initiated by the rules of that tradition. However, initiation is personal, and you don't have to ever be initiated into a tradition if that is not what you are called to do. Although initiation is a hot button topic, one type of tradition is not better than another. But it is important to remember if you are not initiated into a specific tradition, any practice you participate in is not a part of that tradition.

The following is a self-initiation ritual. Although we are both initiates in a few different traditions, these are not rituals that can be transmitted via a book.

Witch Self-Initiation Ritual

Perform a self-initiation ritual when you feel ready to take on the mantle of Witch. This should not be taken on lightly. Make sure that you're clear about why you're asking for this transition and know it will impact your life. A spiritual initiation has a way of bleeding over into your life that you might not expect.

This ritual draws a definitive line. You're agreeing to step across the line. Before this ritual you may have considered yourself a Witch, but after this ritual you will fully embrace this title. It can be performed at any time, but is best done during a time that is auspicious for you. Only you can determine what that might be. Perhaps you pick a solar holiday, your birthday, or a full moon. What's important is for the date to feel special to you.

This ritual is written without deity. However, if you are called to dedicate to a specific deity, you can easily add them to this ritual: after you call to the elements, add a deity calling and speak about why you are taking on this initiation. You'll also want to add an image of them to your altar space.

Supplies: A candle, incense, a bowl of water, a bowl of earth, a piece of jewelry that you will dedicate to your Craft, herbs to burn for cleansing, a

firesafe container, an athame, a wand, a chalice, a pentacle, a small cauldron or firesafe container, a journal, and an anointing oil. (An anointing oil can be created with a simple base oil, like almond oil, and a few drops of your favorite essential oil added to it.)

Set Up: Create an altar using all the items listed in the supplies section. Place the pentacle in the center of the space with your piece of jewelry on top of it. Keep the anointing oil near the pentacle. Use a compass to determine where the four directions are. Set the bowl of earth as close as possible to north. Place the athame, firesafe container, herbs for burning, and incense as close as possible to east. Set the candle and wand as close as possible to south. Set the bowl of water and the chalice as close as possible to west. Keep your journal nearby.

Before starting the ritual, take a cleansing bath or shower. Put on robes or remain skyclad for the ritual.

Ritual: Before you step up to your altar space, take a moment and ground and center yourself. Make sure you feel prepared for the ritual to begin. When ready, light the cleansing herbs and use the smoke to sain or smudge yourself and the room where you are performing the ritual.

Set down the herbs and pick up your athame. Starting in the north, draw an invoking pentacle at each of the directions, ending where you started. Then draw an invoking pentacle above and below your ritual space.

Light the incense and contemplate your relationship with air. Air is a symbol of thought, new beginnings, music, communication, and clarity. How do you honor this element in your life? Notice your breath and how you inhale and exhale without thought. Consider your relationship with air as oxygen that moves blood through your body. Air keeps you alive. Take a moment to speak your gratitude to air. If you choose, write down anything important from this contemplation in your journal.

Set down the incense and pick up the candle. Contemplate your relationship with fire. Fire is a symbol of energy, passion, sexuality,

comfort, and movement. How do you honor this element in your life? Notice how your heart beats and you are able to move your thoughts from one thing to the next. Consider your relationship with fire as the neurons send signals through your body. Fire keeps you alive. Take a moment to speak your gratitude to fire. If you choose, write down anything important from this contemplation in your journal.

Set down the candle and pick up the bowl of water. Take some time to contemplate your relationship with water. Water is a symbol of emotions, flow, intuition, creativity, and depth. How do you honor this element in your life? Place your fingers on your pulse and feel the flow within you. Consider your relationship with water as the blood that moves through your veins. Water keeps you alive. Take a moment to speak your gratitude to water. If you choose, write down anything important from this contemplation in your journal.

Set down the bowl of water and pick up the bowl of earth. Contemplate your relationship with earth. Earth is a symbol of ancestors, grounding, power, stability, and stillness. Feel your flesh and the bones beneath. Consider your relationship with earth as the living land that is your body and feeds your body. Earth keeps you alive. Take a moment to speak your gratitude to earth. If you choose, write down anything important from this contemplation in your journal. Set down the bowl of earth.

If there are any deities that you want to call in to witness this rite, take this moment to do so. Speak from the heart and ask them to join you as you embark on a rite of passage, as you initiate yourself as a Witch.

When you feel ready, pick up your athame. Hold it up to the east and draw an invoking pentacle. Say:

I claim this athame as initiate
By blood and bone
By breath and heart
By power and stone
I name myself Witch of the Arte

Run the athame through the smoke of the incense and the candle flame. Sprinkle the athame with water and earth. Set the athame back on your altar and pick up the wand.

Face south and hold your up wand, drawing an invoking pentacle. Say:

I claim this wand as initiate
By blood and bone
By breath and heart
By power and stone
I name myself Witch of the Arte

Run the wand through the smoke of the incense and the candle flame. Sprinkle the wand with water and earth. Set the wand back on your altar and pick up the chalice.

Face west and raise the chalice above your head. Say:

I claim this chalice as initiate
By blood and bone
By breath and heart
By power and stone
I name myself Witch of the Arte

Run the chalice through the smoke of the incense and the candle flame. Sprinkle the chalice with water and earth. Set the chalice back on your altar and pick up the pentacle.

Face north and raise the pentacle above your head. Say:

I claim this pentacle as initiate
By blood and bone
By breath and heart
By power and stone
I name myself Witch of the Arte

Run the pentacle through the smoke of the incense and the candle flame. Sprinkle the chalice with water and earth. Set the pentacle back on your altar.

Pick up the piece of jewelry. Run it through the incense smoke and candle flame. Sprinkle it with water and earth. Set it back down on the pentacle. Say:

I wear this jewelry as a Witch
By blood and bone
By breath and heart
By power and stone
I name myself Witch of the Arte

Put the piece of jewelry on. Chant the following words, raising energy until you feel complete in the process:

Air fills me
Fire powers me
Water soothes me
Earth holds me
The power circles round and round
The power circles round

Take your time after the chanting naturally ends. If you feel called to write anything down in your journal, do this now. When you feel ready, speak to any deities you called into the ritual. Thank them for witnessing your rite of self-initiation.

Pick up your athame and use it to draw a banishing pentacle below and above your ritual space. Turn to the north and draw a banishing pentacle, then turn to the west and repeat the process. Do this again in the south and the east, ending at the north.

The circle is open. Blessed be.

After initiation, you may feel different. There's a scene in the movie *Interview with the Vampire* where Louis (the newly created vampire) sees with his vampire eyes for the first time. Everything is a little sharper, crisper, and clearer. Post-initiation often feels a bit like that.

As a self-initiated Witch, you now hold the responsibility of carrying that lineage. You are a member of the Witch community.

Starting a Coven

For some folks, the idea of starting a coven may be a terrifying idea, while others may already be thinking about which friends and neighbors they want to sign up. The truth is, starting a coven isn't that difficult, but starting one with good boundaries and structure can be. What is important to know before you start down the road is what it is you want from the group. In Paul Huson's seminal book *Mastering Witchcraft*, he comments, "The magical reasons behind such a ritual are those of acceptance of the individual into the coven group mind." [18]

The starting of a coven is like the process of getting pregnant and giving birth; the first ritual that happens when a coven comes together is very much like a birth blessing or naming ceremony.

Phoenix's Experience with Covens

I started my first eclectic coven at the age of sixteen. We didn't know what we were doing. We didn't have any older mentors. We only had access to books, so we used what we had. That was in the early 1990s, and a lot has changed since then.

That little starter coven didn't do anything wrong, but we didn't do a lot right either. Not for a lack of excitement or motivation, but rather because of a lack of mentorship. Books are amazing—they can give you a lot of

basic information—but experience offers so much more. Performing a ritual out of a book was fine, interesting, and a little magickal. However, years later when I performed one of those same rituals with someone who had years of experience and "knew what they were doing," the ritual felt so much more clear. It wasn't that we made mistakes, but we lacked the training and background to truly grasp the magick we attempted.

I've started several covens since that first starter coven. They have all worked and not worked in their own ways. But I'll tell you one thing for sure: the covens that didn't work out ended because they didn't start out on the right foot.

For example, I was part of a coven that stuck around for about four years. We did a lot of work together as a group. We met regularly and were friends outside of coven life. Our status as a coven happened rather quickly. I don't think any of us stepped into the coven fully aware of what we were doing; it just sort of happened. Because of that, we didn't set up any agreements. We didn't have a plan for what it meant to be in the coven or what it might mean if we ran into problems, disagreements, or any other issues on a personal level.

We also didn't know what everyone else wanted from the group. Were we a traditional coven? Were we a learning group? Who was planning our gatherings? How would we determine that structure going forward? None of that was clear or even discussed.

In this specific group, I didn't want to be in a leadership role. I entered into this coven with the assumption that leadership would rotate and it wouldn't be left up to any one of us to plan an event, ritual, or gathering. That ended up being one of the biggest reasons that the coven didn't work out. We all entered into the group with our own expectations that didn't exactly fit the expectations of any other person. It's rather amazing we were able to keep it going for four years.

Real Coven Life

There’s an assumption that coven life is glamorous and everything is about ritual and magick. This can totally be true, but there are also a lot of mundane tasks that need to happen in coven life, like scheduling, planning, setting up ritual space, gathering communication, and potentially dealing with money for ritual supplies. These are not glamorous tasks, but they are important ones.

Before performing the following Calling the Coven Ritual, it is important to have some clarity on what you want the coven to look like. Ask yourself and/or your potential coven mates these questions:

1. What is the leadership structure of this coven?
2. How does leadership function and who are they responsible to?
3. What is the process for dealing with conflict?
4. How often will coven meet?
5. Where will the coven meet?
6. What deities will this group work with, if any?
7. What is the process for joining the coven?
8. What is the process for leaving the coven?
9. What is the process when there are conflicts?
10. Who will organize and plan gatherings?

It’s a good practice to have these things in writing and to make them available to all the members of the group. If you are working in a nonhierarchical structure, it’s a good idea to have everyone in the group agree to these basic information points. If you have one head or leader of your coven, it’s a good practice to make these points accessible to anyone who joins.

Calling the Coven Ritual

When you are ready to call coveners into your life, take time to call the right coveners. It’s rather similar to when you call a new love relationship

into your life. Make space to think about the perfect coven situation. How many people do you want to call into your group? What experience level do you hope participants will have? Imagine the perfect group in your mind. This ritual should take place over seven nights, with the last night ending on a full moon.

Supplies: A large white candle at least six inches in length, your favorite incense, a knife for carving into the candle, paper, a pen, a bowl of salt water, and an athame.

Set Up: Place all of these items on a table or flat surface where they can sit undisturbed for the coming seven days. You will need to sit at this place for up to an hour.

Ritual: Pick up the bowl of salt water and sprinkle yourself with it as a cleansing. Take three deep breaths, and when you feel ready, use that water to cleanse the ritual space around you. Light the incense and keep it burning throughout the ritual. Relight it every night for the next seven nights.

Set down the bowl of water and pick up the athame. Face the north, draw an invoking pentacle, and say, “I call upon the earth, the bones, the ancestors. I ask your guidance and wisdom in building my coven. Please bring in your stability and power. Hail and welcome.”

Turn to the east, draw an invoking pentacle, and say, “I call upon the air, communications, the song. I ask your guidance and wisdom in building my coven. Please bring in your clarity and focus. Hail and welcome.”

Turn to the south, draw an invoking pentacle, and say, “I call upon the fire, the movement, the energy. I ask your guidance and wisdom in building my coven. Please bring in your passion and excitement. Hail and welcome.”

Turn to the west, draw an invoking pentacle, and say, “I call upon the water, the flow, the intuition. I ask your guidance and wisdom in building

my coven. Please bring in your fluidity and depth. Hail and welcome."

Turn to the north and draw a final invoking pentacle before setting the athame down on your altar.

If there are any specific deities that you want to work with in your coven, now would be the time to call them in. Speak from your heart.

Next, sit down and carve into the candle. Use symbols, words, numbers, and basic figures to express the coven you want to create. Take your time with this process.

When you feel ready, light the candle and say this three times:

I light this candle
Coven magick I name
I call forth Witches
By the light of this flame

Place the lit candle in front of you and begin to write out your ideal coven. Write out clearly all the best options, all the perfect ideals, everything you most desire this coven to possess. Take your time, be clear in your desires, and start over if you need to. Write clearly and concisely. Be specific, but not so specific that you leave out the possibility of mystery.

When you feel ready, read the letter out loud and then fold the paper in half toward you, visualizing those perfect people coming toward you. Place the folded paper under the candle and sit in meditation for as long as you feel called. Notice any signs, symbols, or messages that come through during your meditation.

When this process feels complete, snuff out the candle, pick up your athame, face north, and draw a banishing pentacle. Turn to the west, draw another banishing pentacle, and say, "Thank you to the water, the flow, the intuition. Thank you for your fluidity and depth. Hail and farewell."

Turn to the south and draw a banishing pentacle. Say, "Thank you to the fire, the movement, the energy. Thank you to the passion and excitement.

Hail and farewell."

Turn to the east and draw a banishing pentacle. Say, "Thank you to the air, the communications, the song. Thank you for your clarity and focus. Hail and farewell."

Turn to the north and draw a banishing pentacle. Say, "Thank you to the earth, the bones, the ancestors. Thank you for the stability and power. Hail and farewell."

The circle is open and the work for this night is done.

Leave your altar space and return to it the next night. Follow the same ritual, except instead of carving the candle and writing the letter, just light the candle and read the letter you wrote. Fold it again and place it under the candle while you sit in meditation. Close the circle when you feel complete.

Follow this same ritual process for seven nights. On the final night, bring a firesafe container. Follow the ritual process as you have each night, read the letter out loud, and then use the candle to burn the letter. Anoint yourself with the ashes and leave the candle burning until it extinguishes itself. Make sure to practice fire safety and do not leave the candle unattended.

A Coven's First Ritual

This ritual is written for a coven that plans to work together without hierarchy and with shared leadership. It should be performed at the first official gathering of all the members of the group. Decide ahead of time who will hold which ritual roles. If there are more roles than members, split things out as equitably as possible. In this ritual the roles will be written for generic ritualists. Split these pieces up.

If there is a location where your group typically meets, set up the ritual there. No matter where you meet, set up an altar in the middle of the space.

Supplies: Each member's athame, herbs for cleansing, a bowl of salt water, five thick candles, flowers, a chalice, cakes, and wine.

Set Up: Create an altar in the middle of the ritual space. Place the four candles on the edges of the table in the directions of north, east, south, and west, with the final candle being placed in the center of the altar. Place the flowers in a way that is visually appealing. Do the same with the plate of cakes. Pour wine into the chalice and place the chalice next to the candle in the center of the table. Place the athames on the table around the center candle. Place the bowl of salt water and cleansing herbs wherever they will fit on the table.

Ritual: Begin by burning the cleansing herbs. One by one, cleanse each other with the smoke. Take turns so each person gets cleansed and each person has the opportunity to cleanse another person.

Ritualist picks up the bowl of salt water and walks around the perimeter of the circle, sprinkling the salt water as they go. This is to cleanse the ritual space.

Each coven member picks up their athames, which will be used to carve into the middle candle. One at the time, an individual carves their name or a symbol that represents them in the coven. Once all members have carved into the candle, one of the Ritualists lights the candle and says, "This flame illuminates our connection. We step into the mystery as coven. May the light guide our way."

All coven members should put the tip of their blade to the center candle. Draw up the power of the coven flame into the blades. As a group, direct that power to the north, drawing an invoking pentacle. All coveners should turn to the east and then draw an invoking pentacle. All coveners repeat this process to the south and the west, returning to the north. Finally, all coveners point their athames above them, drawing an invoking pentacle, and repeat the process below them as well.

Ritualist: “We are between the worlds, and what happens between the worlds changes all the worlds. So mote it be.”

All coveners put their blades down.

Ritualist lights the candle in the north and says, “We call upon the powers of the earth. We call upon strength and stability. We ask these powers to bless our coven and support our magick. We are of the earth, we are flesh and blood, we are the lineages of Witches, hail and welcome earth.”

Ritualist lights the candle in the east and says, “We call upon the powers of the air. We call upon clarity and communication. We ask these powers to bless our coven and support our magick. We are of the air, we are breath and song, we are the lineages of Witches, hail and welcome air.”

Ritualist lights the candle in the south and says, “We call upon the powers of the fire. We call upon passion and creativity. We ask these powers to bless our coven and support our magick. We are of the fire, we are energy and warmth, we are the lineages of Witches, hail and welcome fire.”

Ritualist lights the candle in the west and says, “We call upon the powers of water. We call upon intuition and emotions. We ask these powers to bless our coven and support our magick. We are of the water, we are blessings and depth, we are the lineages of Witches, hail and welcome water.”

If your coven decides to work with specific deities, ancestors, or allies, now is the time to call them into the circle, ask for their blessings, and dedicate your coven to working with them.

Each coven member should then speak their intention to the circle, an oath of commitment.

Once all members have had a chance to speak to the group, everyone should sing, dance, play drums, working together to raise energy to solidify the ritual you have created together.

One of the Ritualists should then speak gratitude and thanks to the deities or allies that have been called in.

Ritualist that lit the candle in the west picks up that candle and says, “Thank you to the powers of water. We thank you for blessing our coven with intuition and emotion. Hail and farewell.” Then blow out the candle.

Ritualist that lit the candle in the south picks up that candle and says, “Thank you to the powers of fire. We thank you for blessing our coven with passion and creativity. Hail and farewell.” Then blow out the candle.

Ritualist that lit the candle in the east picks up that candle and says, “Thank you to the powers of air. We thank you for blessing our coven with clarity and communication. Hail and farewell.” Then blow out the candle.

Ritualist that lit the candle in the north picks up that candle and says, “Thank you to the powers of earth. We thank you for blessing our coven with strength and stability. Hail and farewell.” Then blow out the candle.

Each member of the coven should then pick up their athame and face outward. With their athames, they call back the power that they spread out into the circle around them. Each draws their athame up and over, pointing it back into the candle in the center of the altar. One member snuffs the candle and all clap their hands. The circle is open.

Ending a Coven

Of course, with all things built and created, you run the risk of that thing falling apart or ending. Covens are complicated relationships, which means they could end just like any other relationship. This could be for simple reasons like folks moving away, a change in work where time is no longer accessible, or children being born and focus changing. A coven breakup is hard for emotional reasons—again, just like any other relationship ending.

The ending of a coven is a type of death that not everyone will experience. Many Witches and Pagans choose to be solitary practitioners, which is a totally valid way of practicing. However, much like going through divorce, a coven ending can be a big life change. If you find yourself in the midst of a coven breakup, you may want to go back and

read the section on divorce in chapter 6; there is potentially a lot of crossover.

Because you are dealing with several people in a coven, it may be difficult to get all of the members together to formally, ritually, and magickally sever any ties. However, I cannot express enough how important it is to ritualize the breaking of a coven bond, even if all the members of that group cannot—or will not—go through the ceremonial process together.

After leaving a coven, a coven dissolving, or a ritual to disband, it is a good idea to perform a cutting and clearing ritual for yourself. Coven members tend to be tightly woven into each other's spiritual bodies. A thorough cleansing and cutting of those ties will be important for moving forward.

Coven Breakup Ritual

There are times when a coven is clear that it is time to end things. If you can all get along enough to formalize or ritualize the ending of that relationship, all the better. This ritual should be done when all members can be present. Gather in a neutral place if possible; an outdoor place with a body of water is ideal.

Supplies: Each member is encouraged to bring a crystal or stone that represents their time in the coven. One member brings a single basket or bowl to hold all the crystals.

Set Up: Gather outdoors with each person holding their crystal.

Ritual: If your group has a typical process for creating sacred space, follow this process. If not, allow for your gathering to be informal. Everyone places their crystals in the basket or bowl.

One at a time each member holds the basket and speaks of their gratitude to the coven. They share any stories that are important or vital to their

process. When each member has had their moment to speak over the crystals, take a moment to ensure nothing else needs to be said.

When the group is ready, move to the body of water. Each person takes their crystal and tosses it into the body of water. As the crystals leave their hands and go into the water, their connection to the coven is cleansed and released. When everyone has released their crystal, individuals should take a moment to thank and honor each other for their journey together.

When the group feels ready, any sacred space that was created should be taken down. If possible, each member walks away on their own.

Elderhood

There's a predilection in the United States to dismiss aging and any thought of getting old. To say that the US is obsessed with youth and youth culture is an understatement. Older Witches and Pagans we've spoken to often cite the distressing phenomenon of becoming invisible within their own communities. With invisibility, there comes a loss of power, relevance, and inclusion. Many older Pagans feel as if they are not considered a vital constituency within their community.

Thankfully, there is a way to reverse this trend. You can choose to honor the aging transition into elder status via a ritual that celebrates this rite of passage. Most importantly, while part of the rite of passage and the ritual that accompanies it can be undertaken by those older folks that identify as elders, a portion of the ritual should be shared with the entire community. As with other rites discussed, it's essential that folks are "one who has gone through the rite."

Ideally, as people grow older, they gain experience. There's tremendous value in sharing experience with folks that haven't gone through as many crises, setbacks, joys, or losses. Passing along stories to the next generation serves the dual purpose of creating continuity and establishing connection. While the specifics of any person's journey through life may be wildly different, there are more similarities than differences.

In some Witchcraft and Pagan circles, there are people who have issues with the words “elder,” “crone,” or “sage.” In the case of “elder,” it’s critical to have a clear definition of the word and how it’s applied. There are practitioners of Witchcraft and Paganism that are elders in their level of experience but are quite young in the number of years they have been alive. Conversely, there are practitioners that are older in years but have only been practicing their Craft for a very short time. “Elder” and “older” are not synonymous terms. “Older” is definitively connected to age. “Elder” *may* be connected to age but is demonstrably connected to experience. One distinction we have found helpful is the designation of an elder in age being written as “elder,” while an Elder of training or experience is written as “Elder.”

The terms “crone” and “sage” are often considered too gender specific. Not all practitioners identify with these binary choices. Again, this is a place where “elder” or “elderhood” might be appropriate. It’s entirely possible new terminology will evolve that is less gendered, and we look forward to that day.

Returning to elders, crones, and sages, it’s interesting to note that there isn’t necessarily an age requirement. Instead, the power is given to the individual to determine when they have crossed the threshold into their own elderhood. It is worth noting that, anecdotally at least, most folks that are ready to step into elderhood look to their elders to plan and perform the ritual. This makes perfect sense when you think about it—of course people would want those that have already passed through the gates of elderhood to lead the way.

Elderhood Ritual

The ritual ideally includes others who have entered into elderhood and at least one person, apart from the participant, that has not. The person(s) who is not an elder represents the rest of the community/tradition/family. We’ll refer to them as “community.” If the ritual space is sufficiently large, the other elders will be in a separate room or area at the beginning

of the ritual. Ahead of time, decide who will be the voice of Community and who will be the voice of Elder.

Supplies: A broom, a drink (like a cup of tea), food (enough for sharing), a bowl of water, a bowl of earth, a white six-inch pillar candle, gifts for the elder-to-be from their elderhood peers and from the community, and photos of those who have attained elderhood that are not present. These could be people from one's tradition, venerated family members, or important lineage holders.

Set Up: In one room, set up the broom, food, and drink. This is where the not-yet-elders of the community will be. In a separate room, the elderhood peers should wait with another altar. On this altar, place the bowls of water and earth, the candle, and the photos.

Ritual: The Elder-to-be is greeted at the door by Community.

Community: "You are welcomed here. It has taken you a long time to get here and your journey may have been hard. We will sweep the floor so you may enter a clean, well-kept home."

Members sweep the floor.

Community: "You are welcomed here. It has taken you a long time to get here and your journey may have been hard. Let us make you comfortable."

Members bring Elder-to-be into the room, taking them to a comfortable place to sit.

Community: "You are welcomed here. It has taken you a long time to get here and your journey may have been hard. Let us offer you food and drink."

Members bring Elder-to-be food and drink. Let this moment take the time it takes. Conversation may naturally happen. Stories, laughter, and joy are good during this moment. When it feels appropriate, move on.

Community: "Revered one, long-traveled one, it is time for you to join with the wise ones of our community. It is time for you to enter into

conversation with the elders. We will take you to their circle."

Community member escorts the Elder-to-be to the other elders, but stops at the door.

Community: "This is the realm of the elders. I may bring you to this doorway, but it is not my threshold to cross just yet. The mysteries and wisdom that lie beyond this threshold are for you to discover."

Elder-to-be knocks on the door.

Elders: "Who knocks on this door?"

Elder-to-be: "I do." (States name.)

Elders: "Once you cross through this doorway, there is no turning back. Do you enter of your own free will?"

Elder-to-be: "I do." (If the elder says no, the ritual is over.)

Elders: "Then come in, join us, and tell us about your long journey to this place."

Elder-to-be enters the room. The other Elders welcome them in with a kiss or embrace. They are invited to a special location to sit.

Elders: "Tell your tale of what brought you to our door."

Elder-to-be shares some of their story, talking about their personal trials and tribulations. They share why they are ready to take on the title of Elder. The Elders listen to the tale and when Elder-to-be has finished speaking, the Elders offer advice for the road ahead.

Elder: "Look to the altar and the images of the Elders that could not be here. They guide the way and hold your hand. We walk together. Hail to the Elders and hail to the ancestors."

Elder lights the candle. Elder picks up the bowl of earth and holds it in front of the elder-to-be.

Elder: "Place your hand on the earth."

Elder-to-be places hand on the earth.

Elder: "Feel your connection to the earth. As an Elder it is important to remember our connection to the earth. We carry that with us and remind others of it. Hail earth."

Elder returns bowl to the altar and picks up the bowl of water.

Elder: “Place your hand in the bowl of water.”

Elder-to-be places hand in the water.

Elder: “Feel your connection to the water. As an Elder it is important to remember our connection to the water. We carry that with us and remind others of it. Hail water.”

Elder returns bowl to the altar.

All recite this together:

The Charge of the Crone

By Jim Garrison

I am the Queen of Magic and the dark of the Moon, hidden in the deepest night. I am the mystery of the Otherworld and the fear that coils about your heart in the time of your trials. I am the soul of nature that gives form to the universe; it is I who await you at the end of the spiral dance. Most ancient among gods and mortals, let my worship be within the heart that has truly tasted life, for behold all acts of magic and art are my pleasure and my greatest ritual is love itself. Therefore let there be beauty in your strength, compassion in your wrath, power in your humility, and discipline balanced through mirth and reverence. You who seek to remove my veil and behold my true face, know that all your questing and efforts are for nothing, and all your lust and desires shall avail you not at all. For unless you know my mystery, look wherever you will, it will elude you, for it is within you and nowhere else. For behold, I have ever been with you, from the very beginning, the comforting hand that nurtured you in the dawn of life, and the loving embrace that awaits you at the end of each life, for I am that which is attained at the end of the dance, and I am the womb of new beginnings, as yet unimagined and unknown.[19]

Elder: “Welcome Elder (name).”

Gifts are exchanged. All Elders return to the community where more food, drink, and celebration happens.

Elevations/Leadership

Certain magickal traditions have specific training and other criteria in place. If you are part of one of those traditions, you likely already know the steps to go through an elevations ritual, like moving from a novice to a dedicant or a first degree to a second degree. However, if you are not part of a tradition or work in a more eclectic system, there may be no specific structure for moving up in the system, taking on leadership, or stepping into the role of Priestex (this term is a gender-neutral term for anyone taking on leadership roles in community).

Witches and Pagans tend to be a rebellious lot, and many folks who come to these traditions push back against hierarchy or other enforced titles and roles. However, there is something to be said for completing a training, following a program, or going through a series of lessons. When you complete a training program, it shows you have put in the time and energy to learn up to a certain level. It shows you are willing to dedicate enough of yourself to prepare to pass on what you've learned.

This is by no means a required step in Witchcraft or Paganism. You never have to take on a leadership role, help lead a ritual, or take on students. However, this can feel like a calling for some, and it's important to honor that calling.

Becoming the Priestex Ritual

For this ritual, it will be important to invite participants who are mentors of yours or leaders in your community. Ask people who have been important in your own process and whom you trust to help facilitate this ritual. The pieces for the ritual facilitator will be written as Facilitator and the pieces for the person elevating are written as Priestex.

There are several points in this ritual where decisions will need to be made ahead of time. Make sure that you read through the ritual and make the plans for these points ahead of time.

Supplies: An athame, floral incense, a bowl of salt water, a bowl of earth, a piece of jewelry to represent the individual taking on the title of Priestex, and a large, red pillar candle at least six inches tall.

Set Up: Create an altar in the center of your ritual space in a way that is pleasing to you.

Ritual: Priestex takes a cleansing bath or shower. They will need to air dry and anoint their body with their favorite scent. Before entering the ritual space, they should put on their favorite ritual garb.

While the Priestex takes their ritual bath, the Facilitator creates sacred space. Priestex and Facilitator should determine how this will be done before the ritual begins. Make sure to call upon any guides and allies who have been important to this process.

Facilitator: “We call (name) to the ritual circle.”

Priestex steps to the edge of the circle.

Facilitator: “(Name), do you enter into this ritual of your own free will?”

Priestex: “Yes.”

Facilitator: “Then enter in as my guest and descendant.”

Facilitator gently grasps the arms of Priestex and pulls them into the ritual circle. Facilitator checks on the energetic integrity of the circle and shores up any energetic weakness with their energy.

Facilitator: “I invite you now to awaken the power of the circle, as Priestex in your own right.”

Priestex steps up to the altar, picks up the bowl of salt water, and walks the perimeter of the circle, sprinkling it with the salt water. They return the bowl to the altar and pick up the incense. Priestex walks the perimeter of the circle, using the smoke to charge the circle. They then return the

incense to the altar and pick up the bowl of soil, taking the bowl to each of the directions and reverently tapping the bowl to the ground and raising it up to the sky. Priestex returns the bowl of soil to the altar and picks up the lit candle. They take the candle to each of the directions and reverently tap the base of the candle to the ground and raise it up to the sky.

Facilitator and Priestex face each other in front of the altar.

Facilitator: “You have earned the title of Priestex by your own right and hard work. Do you accept this mantle with all of the responsibility that comes with it?”

Priestex: “Yes.” (If they say no, the ritual is over.)

Facilitator: “Then accept this symbol of your dedication.”

Facilitator lifts up the jewelry on the altar as a symbol of the Priestex title and either hands it to the Priestex to place on themselves or places the object on them. This will need to be determined before the ritual begins.

Facilitator: “Welcome to the fold of Priestex. May your deities and allies always guide your way. Say now what is in your heart.”

Priestex speaks to their mentor, guides, and allies, whatever they may feel called to say.

Facilitator: “Now, as Priestex, please take down our sacred space.”

Priestex takes down sacred space in the way that was decided before.

The rite is done. Blessed be.

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18. Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft*, 218.

19. Garrison, *1998 Magical Almanac*, 289.

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DIY RITUALS

We have said this many times throughout this book, but it bears repeating: the most important rite of passages are the ones that are important to you. It might be super obvious to you what rites we may have missed. You might be able to point to a dozen other moments in your life that would have benefited from a ritual or ceremony to help you through it. This section breaks down how to create rites, rituals, and ceremonies for those moments.

Some DIY (Do-It-Yourself) rituals could be connected to things like:

- Losing a tooth (both for parents and for kids)
- Getting rid of the pacifier
- Riding a bike for the first time
- First time babysitting or being left home alone
- First tattoo
- Engagement
- Starting treatment for a medical illness
- Completion of a major goal or project
- Writing a book

- Hosting a major holiday at your home for the first time
- Losing your virginity
- Getting a new pet
- First grandchild
- Moving into a retirement facility
- Going through a surgery

In the spirit of creating rituals for all your special, significant, challenging life moments, here are some basic ritual outlines to help you get started. These rituals will be simple building blocks that you can add to, adjust, and fill out in ways that best meet the needs of the rite that you are going through.

General Birthing Ritual

Everyone gives birth to many things in their life. You may birth a child, a project, a business or an idea, or even a revolution. Birth comes in many forms. This ritual makes space to honor any birth that you have experienced.

Supplies: Objects to represent what you are giving birth to, flowers for decoration, cakes and ale for celebration, and your typical ritual supplies, like an athame, a wand, candles, incense, or anything else that feels appropriate.

Set Up: Set up an altar with all of the supplies that you've gathered for the ritual.

Ritual: Create sacred space in any way that you feel called.

Acknowledge the process of getting to the point of delivery. Give yourself space to express what it took, how long, what you overcame, what you created, what was hard, and what you are proud of. Do this however you feel called; this could look like speaking your accomplishment out

loud, singing, dancing, writing, creating an art piece, or any other inspiration you are struck with. Let this take the time it takes.

When you are ready, shift into celebrating the thing you have birthed. For example, if you have written a book, lift up the completed book. Bless it, honor it, and be proud. See it going out into the world and having a successful life of its own.

Let this take the time it takes and then move on to celebrating. Have the cakes and ale and honor your accomplishment. Toast to yourself.

Open up your sacred space.

General Loss Ritual

People lose many things during their lives: some of them big, some of them small, but their impacts can be lasting. You may lose a relationship, a family heirloom, a house, a part of yourself (literally or figuratively), a contest, or a business. This ritual is a frame that you can build your own ritual of loss around.

Supplies: Objects to represent the loss, a drum or rattle, and your typical ritual supplies, like an athame, a wand, candles, incense, or anything else that feels appropriate.

Set Up: Set up an altar with all of the supplies that you've gathered for the ritual.

Ritual: Create sacred space in any way that you feel called.

Acknowledge your loss. Share stories of life before the loss and how things are different now. Make time to honor your relief, sadness, anger, shock, fear, or frustration. Acknowledge the process of getting to the point of delivery. Use the drum or rattle to make noise and create energy around the loss. Let this go on as it needs to.

When you are ready, shift into what your life will be like now; the positive and the negative. You may want to continue to make music or

speak out loud. You may also want to sing or dance or write to express this change. Let this take the time it takes and then open up your sacred space.

Presentation to Community Ritual

Presenting yourself to your community in your new state can be difficult. You may find yourself worried about backlash, jealousy, or projections. You may also find yourself supported, lifted up, and celebrated. You are likely to experience a little bit of both of these reactions. One of the things about sharing yourself with the community is that you will always have people who don't agree with your change, want you back the way you used to be, or harbor jealous feelings about your successes.

The point of sharing this is not to prevent you from stepping boldly into your accomplishments and changes, but to know there may be some folks who don't offer you support. And guess what? It may feel hard, but ultimately, the people who do hold jealousy or don't support your changes aren't really your people anyway.

In a presentation to a community ritual, you will need to have a community present. This could take the form of your friends and family, your coven, your larger network, or however you might imagine your community coming together.

Supplies: No supplies are required, but let your intuition guide you.

Set Up: Have a party with your community members invited. Ask specific people to take on roles to help the celebration come together; this could take the form of cooking, decorating, organizing the invitations and guests, or being the DJ or MC for the event.

Ritual: As your community gathers for your event, keep yourself hidden or in a "green room." While the party begins, let yourself have plenty of time and space to ground and center yourself. Perhaps you take a ritual bath and anoint yourself with perfume or oils. Perhaps you get a massage or pamper yourself in some way.

When you feel ready, have a beloved community member introduce you and your new form, title, name, energy, or change to the gathered people. If you feel called, give a speech about the change and how/why you have made this transition. Thank those that have guided you along the way and ask for community support as you move ahead in your new form.

Party! Enjoy the support that is offered and allow yourself to have fun.

Creating Ritual

There are important moments in everyone's life that are unique and special. One person may feel called to mark and ritualize an event another person deems minor or unnecessary. Creating ritual for a life event is like highlighting on a sentence. It helps you to remember things; it gives your brain a way to store the information differently than just another mundane event. And a ritual helps your psyche and spirit to connect into the fact that something has shifted and changed.

A ritual should have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

- Beginning: The opening of a ritual is the set up process. It includes the physical set up process, the personal preparation, creating sacred space, and calling in any allies.
- Middle: The middle of the ritual is the acknowledgment of the rite that is being experienced. It could look like taking a vow, performing an honoring, blessing the new reality, releasing the past, a combination of these things, or a myriad of other things. This is the piece of the ceremony where the transition is acknowledged and stepping over the line into the next phase happens.
- End: This is the closing of the shift and accepting the new phase. The end of the ceremony also includes the thanking of any allies invited into the ritual and the releasing of sacred space.

Within this framework, hundreds of rituals can be created for virtually any rite of passage. Use this to create your own rituals or to adjust any of the rituals in this book for your own purposes. Let your intuition always guide you, and let the process unfold in a way that feels fun and true to you or the person you are creating it for.

Ultimately, rites of passage are intensely personal. Any ritual that is created should be designed for the person going through the rite.

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FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT RITES OF PASSAGE— WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Life is one big rite of passage. If you are lucky, life is filled with wondrous happenings. If you are fortunate enough to discover Witchcraft as a path to follow, you'll view the world through vastly different eyes than most people. Life is magickal, and by honoring your personal rites of passage, you step into the magickal rites more easily.

All things are possible. The world is truly alive and it is your ally. Each life is a blessing. Sharing these blessings with each other only serves to create more blessings that compound upon each other, and who wouldn't want to be involved with that?

Rites of passage and the ceremonies that are created to honor them serve the mythopoetic. They feed the collective unconscious. Souls cry out for mystery and adventure, and rites of passage provide defined moments to let imagination soar, free from the day-to-day. For the duration of the rites, you are timeless. You are eternal. You are joined with every human that has ever existed or will ever exist.

By creating rituals, honoring your life changes, and celebrating those you love and are in community with, you also add to raising the vibrational levels of all of humanity.

Truly, there is no greater work that you can do as an individual than to serve the world around you. By celebrating yourself, you do that very thing.

May you celebrate each moment. May there be rituals at every stage of your life. May those ceremonies and rites bring you joy, heal your pain, and serve as guideposts on this spectacular adventure called life.

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GLOSSARY

Athame: A ritual knife. Traditionally double-sided. Used to gather, send, and direct energy in a ritual setting

Banishing Pentacle: A pentacle drawn in a specific fashion to release energy

Besom: A ritual broom. Used to create a boundary, serve as a threshold, or sweep away in a cleansing fashion

Cakes and Ale: The food and drink that is used in ritual space

Chalice: A ritual cup. Used to consecrate any liquid that might be used in a ritual

Cleansing: To make spiritually clean

Deosil: Moving in a clockwise direction

Elemental: The guardian spirit of any element

Green Blood: A plant being, spirit, or ally

Invoking Pentacle: A pentacle drawn in a specific fashion to lock in or deal in energy

Initiation: The act of being admitted into a group, typically with ritual

Pentacle: A five-pointed star with a circle around it

Pentagram: A five-pointed star

Sain: See *smudge*

Skyclad: Naked for ritual purposes. Literally, clad with the sky

Smudge: To cleanse with the smoke of burning herbs

Sympathetic Magick: Enacting magick on an object as a stand-in for your goal, e.g., making a poppet or doll as a stand-in for the person you want to do healing magick for

Wand: A ritual tool. Traditionally made of wood or natural substances; should be the length of your arm from your elbow to the tip of your middle finger. Used to gather, send, and direct energy in a ritual setting

Wicca: A specific lineage of magickal practitioners. Has become synonymous with anyone practicing a certain format of ritual, but technically Wiccans are initiates of a traditional lineage

Widdershins: Moving in a counterclockwise direction

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